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PUBLISHED
THREE TIMES A MONTH

Adventure

Gordon MacCreagh
Gordon Young
Harold Lamb
Howard B. Beynon
Arthur D. Howden Smith
Hugh Pendexter
Frank Robertson
H. S. Cooper
George McPherson Hunter
Charles Victor Fischer

1 Complete Novel
1 Complete Novelette

SEPTEMBER 30th ISSUE, 1923
VOL. XLII No. 6

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ADVENTURE
Sept. 30th, 1923

Published three times a month by The Ridgway Company at Spring and Macdougal Sts., New York, N. Y. Yearly subscription $6.00 in advance; single copy 25 cents. Entered as second-class matter Oct. 1, 1910, at the post-office at New York, N. Y., under the act of March 3, 1879.

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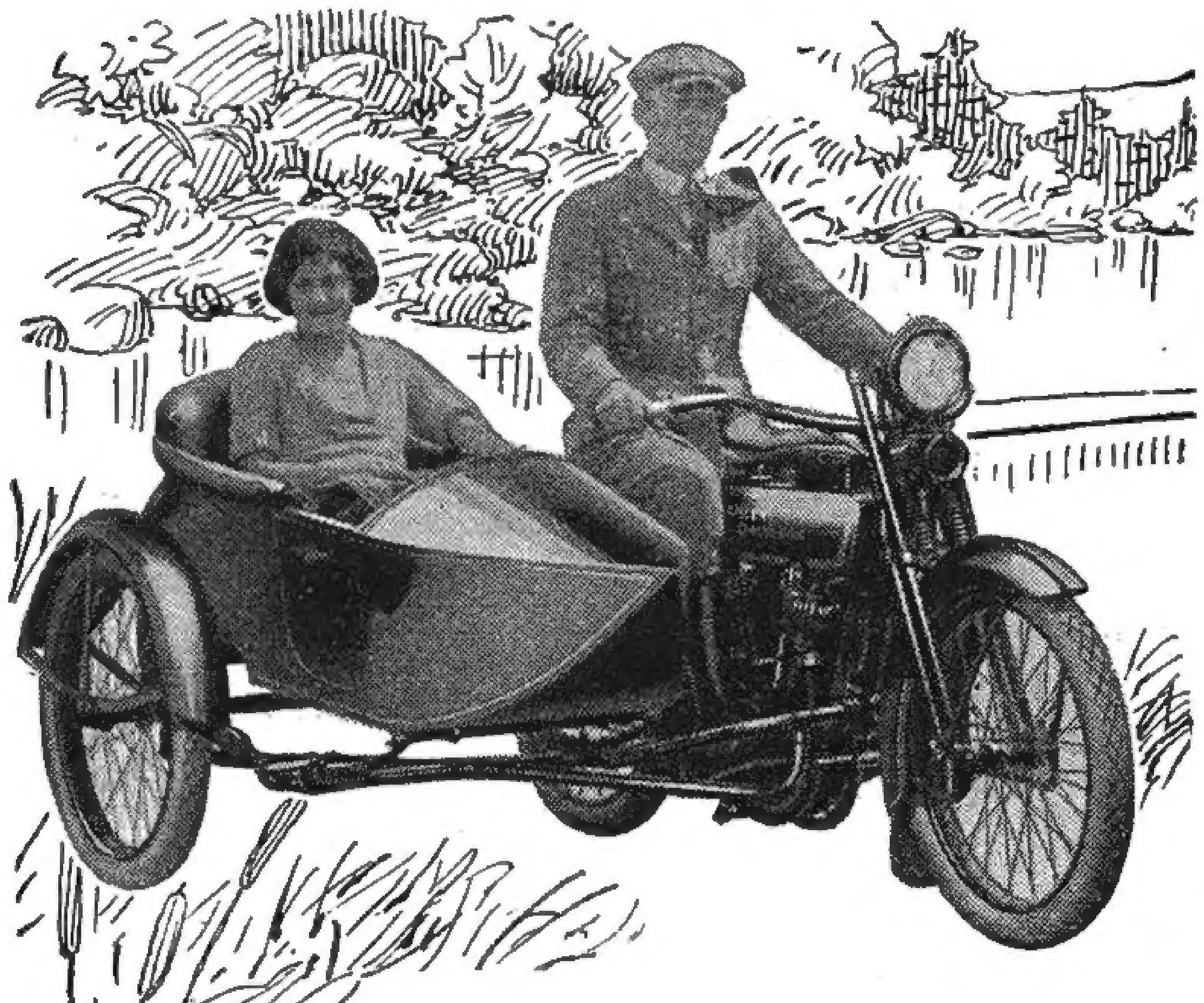

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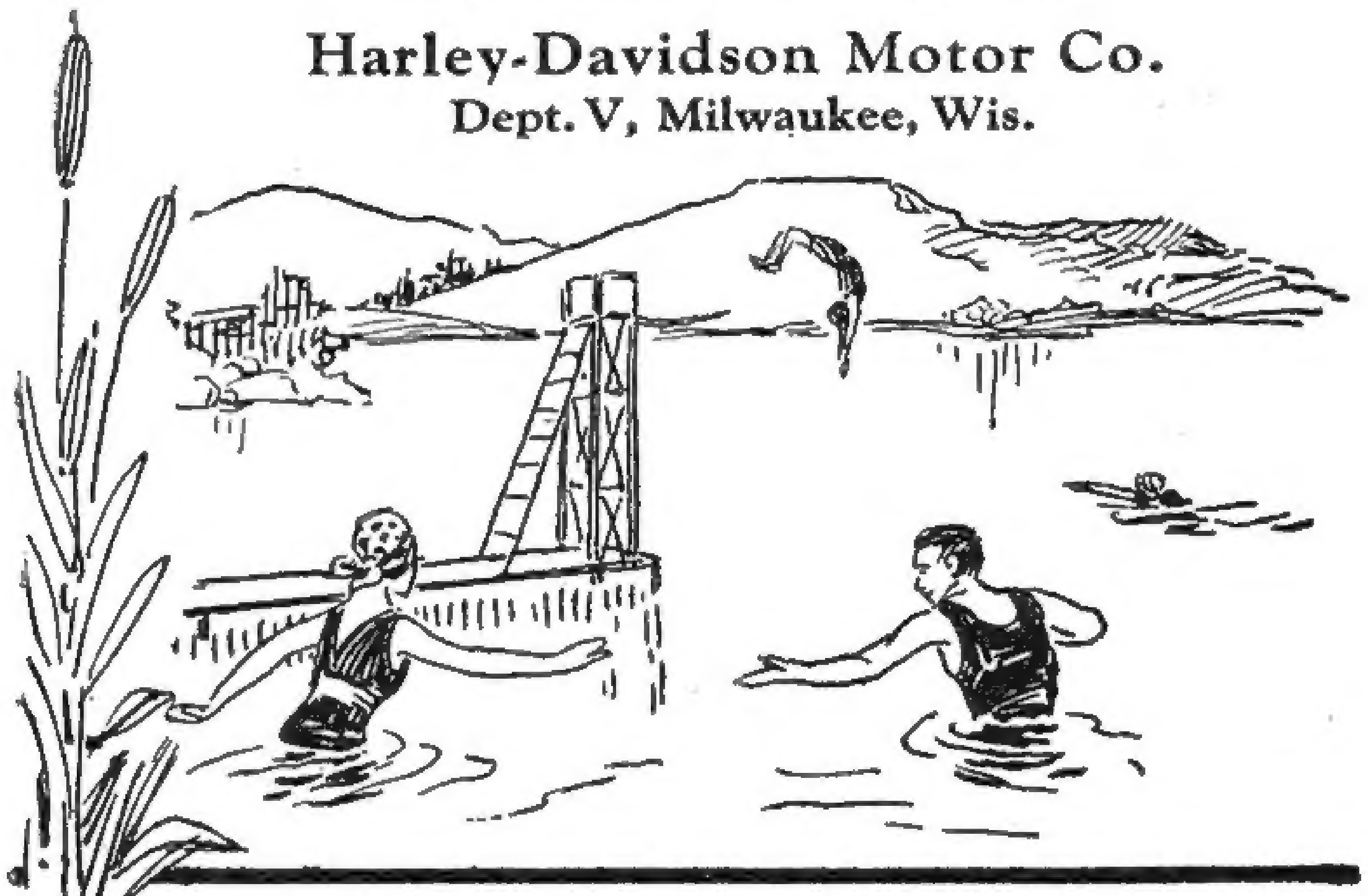

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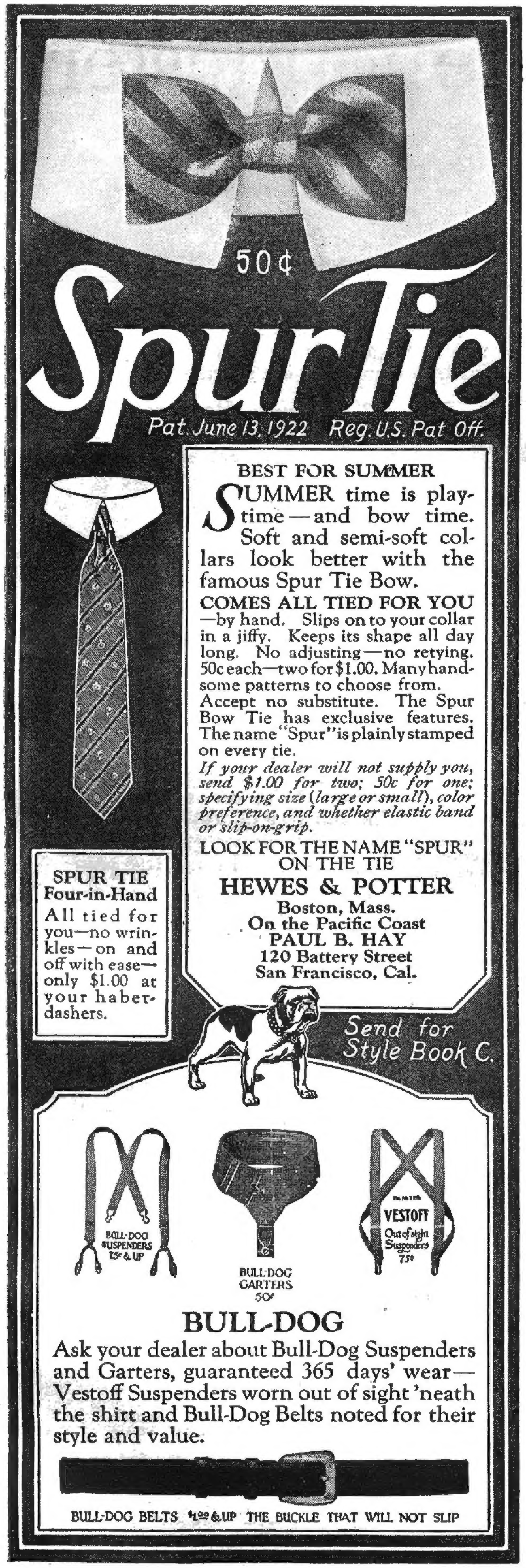
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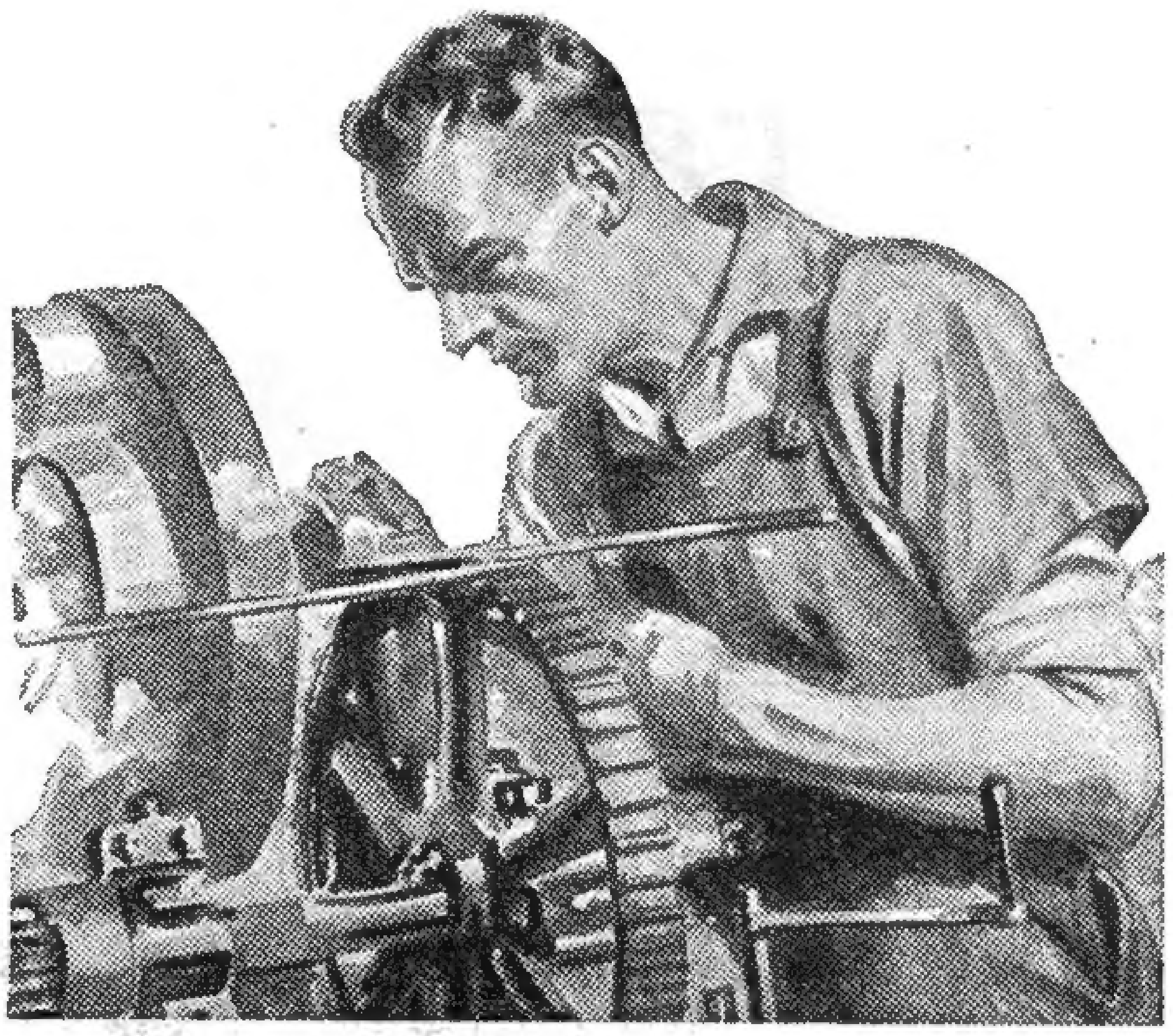

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HERE'S the same coupon—the same opportunity that these men had. There's still a chance for you to get ahead if you will only make the start.

One hour after supper each night, spent with the International Correspondence Schools in the quiet of your own home, will prepare you for the position you want in the work you like best.

Yes, it will! Put it up to us to prove it. Without cost or obligation, just mark and mail this coupon.

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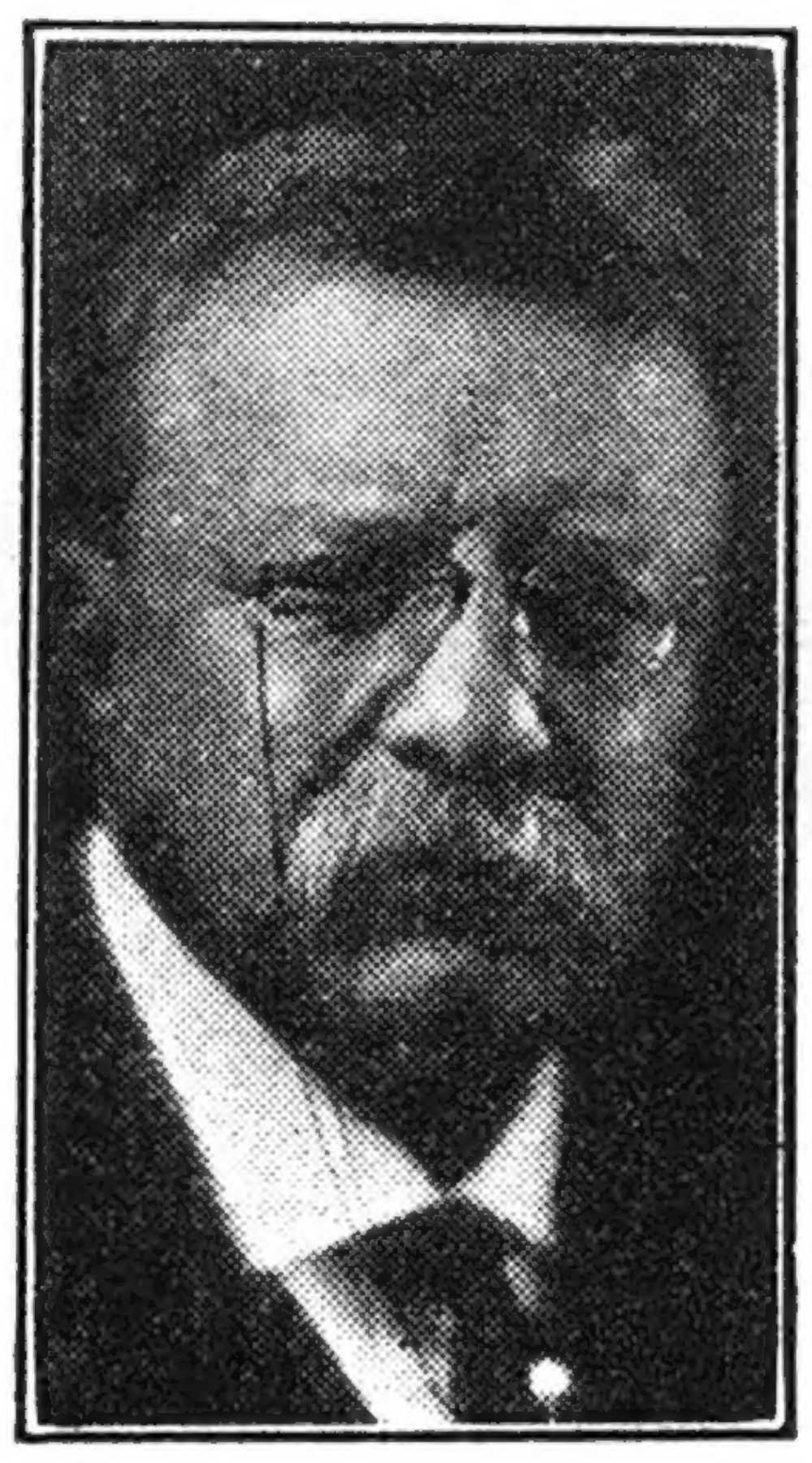
Play Fair with the Youngsters

THERE they go trudging off to school with shining morning faces—books tucked under arms—your greatest treasures—our country's Future Citizens! What a wonderful privilege to have these little lives in your keeping.

Do you love them enough—these children of yours? Are you going to play fair with them?

Just because they have rosy cheeks and bright eyes, don't make the common mistake of taking it for granted that your youngsters must be perfectly well. What do *you* know about eyes, throats, ears, teeth, lungs, hearts, posture, etc.?

Wherever tests have been made, records usually show that the boys and girls who are backward in their studies are suffering from some physical defect which, if taken in time, could be easily corrected. They aren't *dull*—they're *sick*.



© PIRIE MAC DONALD

And He was a Sickly Child!

In writing of his delicate boyhood, Theodore Roosevelt said, "The recollection of my experience gives me a keen sympathy with those who are trying in our public schools and elsewhere to remove the physical cause of deficiency in children, who are often unjustly blamed for being obstinate or unambitious or stupid".

Make sure that *your* children are in fit condition to go back to school. There are four things at least to do immediately.

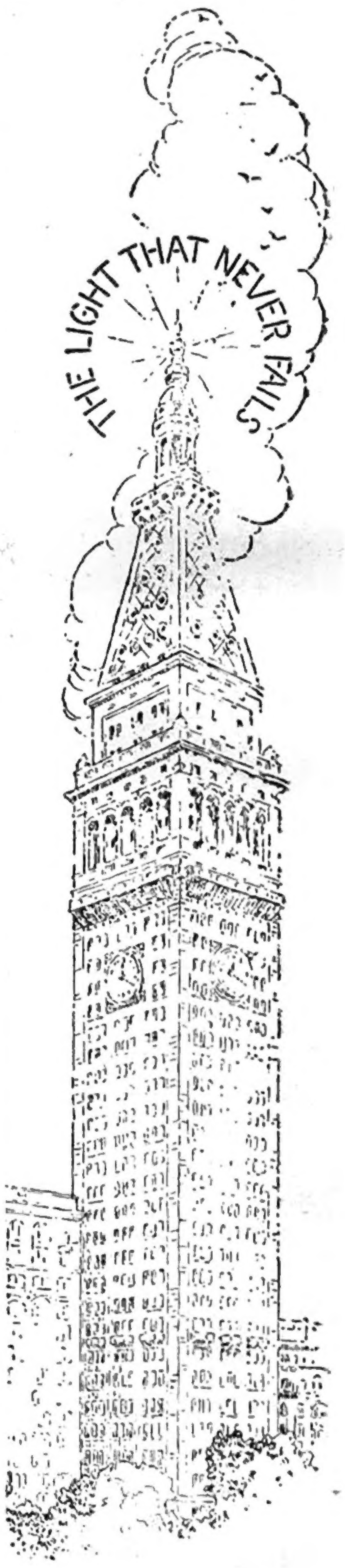
1. ***Eyes.*** Children who cannot see clearly are under a constant nervous strain which is bound to affect their health. Have your children's eyes examined by a competent eye specialist.

2. ***Throats.*** Have your children examined for adenoids and diseased tonsils. Total deafness and many serious illnesses often come from neglecting this danger zone.

3. ***Ears.*** Thousands of children are thought dull in school because they cannot hear distinctly. If anything is wrong with your child's hearing consult a specialist.

4. ***Teeth.*** Much sickness comes from decayed teeth. Physicians say that poison may be carried in the blood from the tooth to other parts of the body. Take your children to a dentist.

Send your boys and girls back to school this fall as healthy as possible. The day is not far off when these youngsters of ours will be the backbone of the Nation—*make them strong!*


THE LIGHT THAT NEVER FAILS

Dr. S. Josephine Baker, former Director of the Bureau of Child Hygiene of New York City, states that "approximately 35% of the children of school age have one or more physical abnormalities:" and she adds that this condition is "universal".

It is most important that health examinations be made regularly in the public schools for the sake of those children who could not otherwise be taken care of.

In many cities this work is first undertaken by a group of benevolent, public-spirited men and women who have supported a program of medical examinations and free clinics in the public schools. The work is usually taken over later by the city and an appropriation voted to cover necessary expenses. That may be the way in which the work can best be begun in your community.

The best time for preventive work is in pre-school days—from babyhood to six years. Just as the best time to take care of the health of the baby is before it is born, so the best time to take care of the school child is before it enters school, rather than after.

The Metropolitan Life Insurance Company has published three booklets on the care of children which it will be glad to send you—"Care of the Teeth", "Tonsils and Adenoids" and "Eyesight and Health". You will find them helpful.

HALEY FISKE, *President.*

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Sept. 30th 1923 Vol. XLII No. 6

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**Occasionally one of our stories will be called an Off-the-Trail" story, a warning that it is in some way different from the usual magazine stories, perhaps a little different, perhaps a good deal. It may violate a canon of literature or a custom of magazines, or merely be different from the type usually found in this magazine. The difference may lie in unusual theme, material, ending, or manner of telling. No question of relative merit is involved.*

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One Novel, One Novelette, Complete

OMMONY stands for all the things that *Meldrum Strange* objects to, including the heresy that more than enough is too much. *Strange* never had enough and loves the power of money. *Ommony* wishes to keep the vast forests intact for the children of India's teeming millions; *Strange* regards them as a source of wealth and plans logging camps here, saw-mills there. Intermingling with the conflict arising from the clash of these two strong wills are the desires of others. That of *Charley Wear*, the Nature photographer; that of *Zelmira* for *Strange*, and that of the *Raja* of *Chota Pegu* for *Zelmira* and the gay life of Paris. "THE MARRIAGE OF MELDRUM STRANGE," a complete novel by Talbot Mundy in the next issue.

NO LIVING thing about the house and outbuildings—an air of desertion over everything—an atmosphere of murder. And then from somewhere the wind brings the strains of music. Such was the opening of a queer three-cornered fight on the Texas border. "THE DERELICT RANCH," a novelette by Barry Scobee, complete in the next issue.

Other stories in the next issue are forecast on the last page of this one.

Adventure **is out on the 10th, 20th and 30th of each month**

Adventure

THE CRAWLING SCRIPT

A COMPLETE NOVEL by Gordon MacCreagh

Sept 30th 1923 Vol XLII No 6

Author of "A Good Sword and a Good Horse," "The Great White Dayong," etc.

CHAPTER I

"INDIAN CURRY, BY JINGS!"

IAN WESTERMAN stalked lankly along Broadway at its busiest hour and grinned in all brotherly love at the hurrying, scuffling stream that bumped him this way and jostled him that. His habitually puckered eyes screwed into the narrowest possible slit and his lean nose wrinkled to the extent of baring his upper teeth, he looked for all the world like a gaunt, gray wolf returning to its own timber as he sniffed with keen appreciation the homelike odors of food and humanity and perfume and gasoline which swirled and eddied all the way from the glaring Forties to the flaring Thirties and back again.

Wolf-like he lifted his head to catch the more subtle scents of newly damp subway entrances and two-flights-up chop-suey palaces, and he grinned appreciatively to himself again as all the old familiar sensations came up one after the other and plucked at his very heart-strings.

He had just come back that same afternoon from building a bridge in Bolivia. Before that he had built a bridge in China, and before that one in India; and before that again in other worse places. And every time he had come back and smelled the smells and gloated over the kaleidoscopic lights of Broadway and sworn that he would forthwith set out to inaugurate a prolonged and hectic spell of riotous living among the bright lights.

He always talked that way. But his friends, when he bumped suddenly into them, would say:

"Why, hello. Darned if it isn't the Iron Man again. Where are you from this time, old scout? And when do you go back to your structural iron?"

"Never, by gosh!" Westerman would exclaim explosively.

And then he would temper that with—

"Not for a long time anyway."

And then he would add ingenuously:

"At least I don't know. I'm dickering just now on a deal with Brown and Black and——"

And then his friends would shout with mirth and would hurry up and invite him to dine with them before the wilderness should claim him again; for they knew that

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this sun-scorched man whose name they paraphrased into "Iron" because of his job and because he was lean and long and lumpy and phenomenally hard, was not one of those whose fate would ever let him sit down and enjoy the city which he claimed as his.

But tonight he had not bumped into any of his friends—as yet. And the hour was already the shouting, honking bedlam when millions of dollars' worth of automobiles were depositing their owners before blazing theater entrances. And he had brought back with him from Bolivia an appetite like the gaunt timber-wolf's. So he sniffed his way, high-headed, along the blaring, flaring road, questing critically for some scent which might attract him.

A scuffling cross-current pushed him into Forty-second Street. He let himself drift. The great tributary was just as keenly exhilarating to him as the main stream. He drank in with delight the colorful twinklings of the new signs. Suddenly he stopped abruptly and sniffed again for the spicy aroma which had filtered down to him.

"Indian curry, by jings!" he muttered. "I haven't eaten curry in a hundred years. Where the —— What d'you know now! Right in the middle of the little old burg! I'll tell you, boy, there's nothing in all the world you can't get in New York."

He turned in at a dim door, up a flight of stairs, and smiled with narrow eyes and wide nostrils at an incense filled room orientally exotic with glaring muslin prints and curved swords and shields draping the walls. An affable and mystic-eyed Parsee met him, salaaming courteously, and led him to a table fringed with a delicately hand-embroidered cloth.

"*Chingree curry, bhath dhal aur chuppatti,*" Westerman ordered with relish.

The soft-eyed gentleman was instantly full of interest.

"Ah, you speak my language, *sahib?*"

"A little," admitted Westerman laconically, already abashed that he had drawn attention to himself. "But you're not a Hindu, are you? Not judging from your clothes, that is."

"No, *sahib;* I am Parsee," said the mystic in a soft, well-modulated English. "I should say better, you speak the language of my adopted country. But my guests are all Hindu, as you see; my cook, my waiters, are Hindu. You will get here a curry exactly like that in the Raj Serai of Delhi."

He bowed ceremoniously.

"May the appetite of health and untroubled spirit be yours, *sahib.*"

The polite blessing suffered no danger of going astray, for Westerman had all the health in the world and not a trouble had ever darkened his genial spirit. After a deliberate hour of satisfaction he paid his very moderate bill and strode from the place feeling at peace with God and man and murmuring yet another benediction upon the wonderful city which could so completely fill the most unusual wants of the most unusual people. And as he lingered in the narrow hallway at the foot of the stairs to fish for a friendly old much-caked pipe, a browny-yellow face with wide cheek bones and fierce little eyes peered stealthily down at him from the balustrade.

CHAPTER II

THE GLIMMERING SCRIPT

WESTERMAN strode out and turned down toward Eighth Avenue. His mood was now that of the *flaneur*, the leisurely stroller who enjoys the sights and sounds and elbow-to-elbow presence of his own people in his own home town.

But while he enjoyed and observed and smiled with appreciative contentment he swung along none the less with the long, unconsciously energetic strides of the woodsmen; leisurely strolling was not in his strenuous nature. The sturdy little brown figure was put to it to keep him in sight without attracting attention in spite of the phenomenal calves that bunched so prominently under the ill-fitting American trousers.

"*Awah*, what manner of man is this who strides like a *mehari* of Bikaneer?" the man grumbled as he spat sidewise in disgust. "God send that he turns into a dark road before I lose him!"

And he speeded up to decrease the distance between them. His invocation seemed to have immediate effect, for Westerman turned up into one of the unfrequented Forties to get into the joyous lights of Broadway again. The man muttered a "*Khoda kerim*"—God is almighty—and speeded up his stride to a trot to even up with his quarry's long legs.

Had he been coming the other way he would have seen Westerman's smile tighten into a thin gash and his eyes narrow down to cold gray slits. That was the only sign.

The brown man scurried after him with no more precaution than he would have used in trailing any city-bred man. How was he to know that this white man had lived in jungles for more years probably than himself? It was under the white radiance of an arc lamp that Westerman turned with a sinewy suddenness that brought the other up short, suddenly apprehensive, but more with the nervousness of a stranger in a strange land than with fear.

"Huh!" Westerman grunted, surveying him coolly. "Queer bird! What are you slinking after me for?"

There was the interest of cool confidence in his tone rather than belligerence.

The man stood at his distance. He was as short and powerfully knit as the white man was tall and rangy, but his fierce, slant, black eyes were as bold as Westerman's wide gray ones. The latter's immediate impression was that some samurai anomaly stepped out of a Hokusai print outfitted in a sailorman's slop shop. But the man replied in Hindustani with just a sufficient trace of an accent to indicate that it was not his native tongue.

"Pardon, excellency. The *sahib* speaks my language—I have heard in the caravanserai. I am a straight man without evil intent, a stallion lost in a mighty jungle of mighty houses. I would hold converse with the protector of the poor."

He stepped confidentially close; and Westerman's nerves tingled; but his man's pride would not permit of any sign of nervousness. He stood his ground without an appreciable move, his shoulders stiff and his legs tensed at the knees.

"Look *sahib*," the man said. "Here is that which is proof that I come as no idle waster of time; a thing which carries a tale of interest and perchance of profit. Will the *sahib* see?"

He cast a swift glance to both sides and then came furtively closer and from under his shirt he produced something that flashed thinly in the lamplight.

Though the position was favorable for a sudden, treacherous stab Westerman moved only his hand, reaching out for the thing. Rather to his surprize the man gave it to him without hesitation. He held it to the light to examine it better; but the man with an exclamation snatched for it and pressed down his hand.

"*Sahib*, by all the gods, care, I pray, that the underlings who pass may not see."

Westerman's thin brows wrinkled in surprize, and he looked at the thing again with greater circumspection. It was a thin blade of springy steel, hand-wrought and inlaid with an intricate design with all the cunning and patience of an Oriental artist whose soul was in his work. It was set in a hilt of carved silver representing a figure of a man standing with his arms folded across his chest, rather grotesque but exquisitely done. It gave the impression more of an ancient Spanish stiletto wrought by the Negroli brothers of old Toledo, except that, being Oriental, the cross of the hilt guard had been carefully avoided. Westerman essayed its balance in his hand; but it was too light to have any balance at all.

"H'm, a deadly enough little bodkin, I suppose; but I wouldn't call it much of a weapon."

The man, who was watching with the keenness of a cat, must have sensed disinterest in his tone; for a quick shade of anxiety passed over his face, and he interposed hastily.

"Nay, *sahib*, but look upon the blade in the dark; under the coat, so; and read the inscription thereon."

Westerman looked again with a mild curiosity under the shadow of his coat, and then a whistle of surprize was forced from his pursed lips. The thin, keen blade glimmered alive with an almost phosphorescent radiance. Looking closer, he saw that certain portions of the inlaid design gleamed softly like a radiolite watch face and that the scintillating curves and twists formed two definite lines of flowing Hindi characters.

"Read, *sahib*, the legend, and say then whether the tale of this thing is worth an hour."

The man's whisper was instinctively cautious and eager, fraught with an active impression of imminent mystery.

The venturesome soul of Westerman responded immediately to the subtle impulse, but he shrugged with impatience.

"I can't read this crawling stuff," he said bluntly.

"*Toba!* That is a pity, sahib. The excellency must then believe my reading, as also he must believe the tale that hangs thereto. Listen then."

He pointed at the glimmering characters with an ocher finger-nail and followed them laboriously. Clearly he was no man of letters.

"Jub ghanta ahgaya
Tub ghanta hogaya."

"Hm! 'When the hour comes then the hour goes,'" translated Westerman. "It don't sound like a —— of a lot of sense to me."

"Nay, excellency, this is verse. 'When the hour has come, then its time is accomplished.' An innocent proverb of Hind; yet the tale thereof is a tale of blood and of men's lives and of much loot. In a suitable place and time would the *sahib* hear?"

"Iron" Westerman was one of those men whose whole life in the very nature of his job so teemed with sudden and unusual experiences that he considered them just experiences. "Adventure" was a word he laughed to scorn.

"There *is* no adventure," he would maintain. "There's just happenings; some of them more unpleasant than others; and some folks get more than others; that's according to the kind of job they hold down."

And as for the "spirit of adventure":

"Shucks!" he would jeer. "That's for office clerks who've never been out to look for it. It is no more than the natural rebellion of a man with an uninteresting job to get away from it once in a while."

This simple explanation of a vexed problem was eminently satisfying to his logical soul. Yet the Red Gods made their magic in that vigorous, highly efficient heart with an efficacy which would have surprized and disgusted him had he ever been able to realize it. The least hint of excitement—which meant to him anything other than the monotony of building bridges in the uttermost ends of the earth—lured him as irresistibly as it lured any small boy who ran away to become a pirate. And the subsequent "happenings" which evolved out of his strenuous "rebellion" were always enjoyed with a zest and with a carefree absence of responsibility which would have astonished that same small boy.

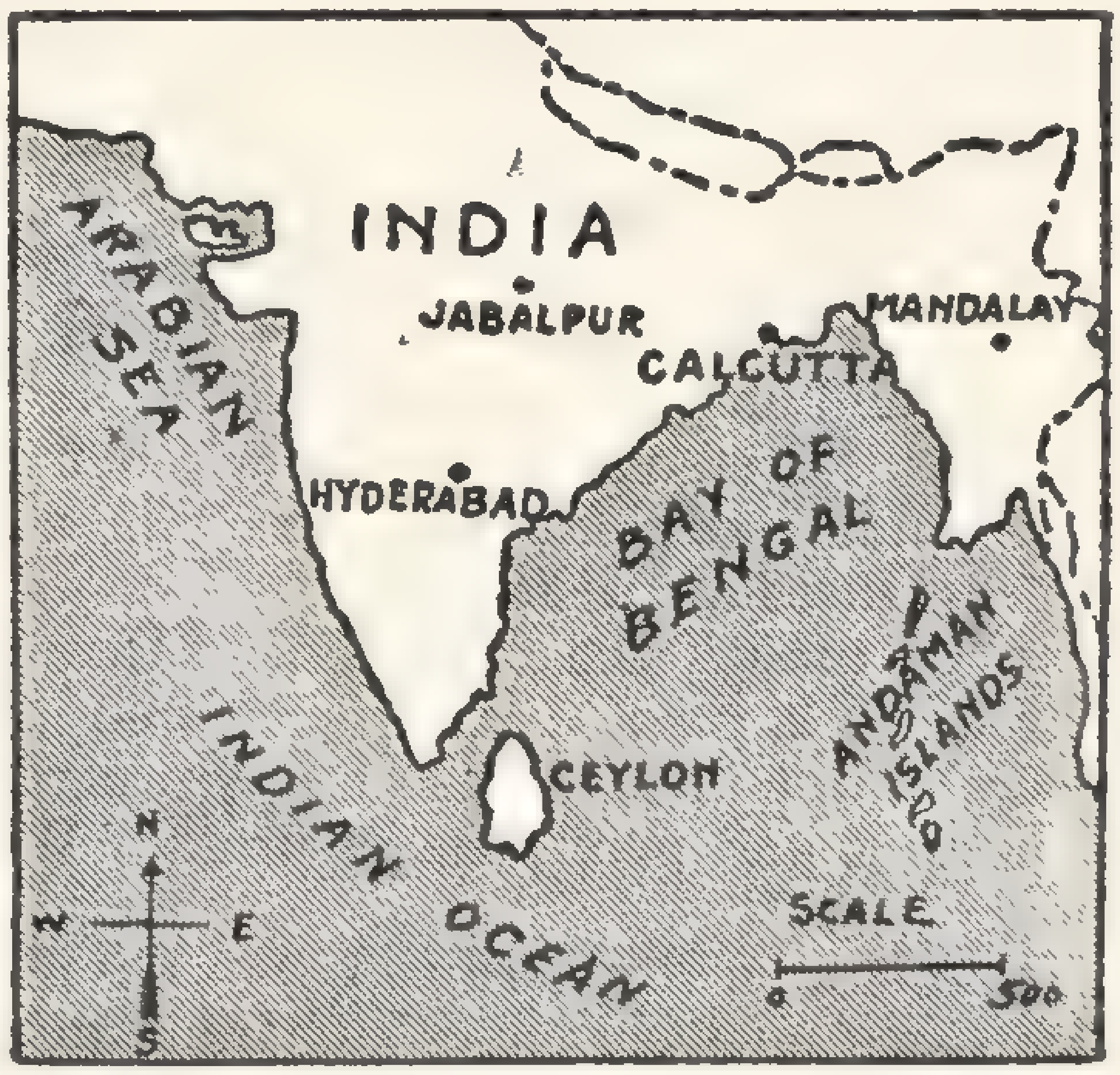
This queer dagger with its carven hilt and its glimmering, mystical runes lured him now with a spell as powerful as a hypnotist's. He looked down at the man from under his corrugated brows, and his eyes were as eager as a questing hawk's.

"Well, now, I have a place in Seventy-third—my little bachelor den that I always hang on to. S'pose you come up and let's hear the yarn."

THE man with quick Oriental intuition understood his tone rather than his words and followed him readily enough to the cozy living-bed-and-bath on which he paid the rent for the privilege of occupying it for some two months in the year. But since the privilege left him a free man, to come and to go as he pleased without question by any man and without preliminary arrangements; and since personal freedom was as necessary to him as clean air, he considered the privilege well worth the cost—even at modern rents.

The living-room startled one at first glance by its entire absence of feminism. Most conspicuous, of course, was a rack in which stood several rifles and a couple of shotguns. One wondered immediately whether the owner had taken them all with him to Bolivia or whether he had set to and cleaned them to their spotless polish instantly on his arrival home.

Books there were in modest profusion—well-thumbed books, most of them obviously picked up second hand—this man, it was clear, liked books for the meat in them, not for their looks. And pipes. Black, rancid, chummy-looking pipes lay everywhere; on tables, mantel-shelf, and window-sills and on the arms of the deep, comfortable chairs.



There was no sort of musical instrument; not even a phonograph; and no pictures. Neither music nor art seemed to find a place in his strenuous life. Not colored pictures, that is to say; though photographs of all the queerest places in the world covered the walls and mingled discordantly with weapons and curios with a lamentable lack of harmony which would have made a professionally artistic decorator of "the home beautiful" very ill indeed.

But however hopelessly at variance with correct and approved art, it was surely a rest for jaded spirits. It was just the kind of den that men like to visit. People felt that they could lean back and put their boots on the table edge and blow smoke at the ceiling without having visions of some steely-eyed female of the species going round afterward with a rag and furniture polish; and the most esthetic of them were never disturbed by the prevailing dissonances of "color scheme." There were too many other things to attract and hold the eye. The unusual wealth of pelts, for instance. There were skins of all sorts and everywhere; skins on the floor; skins over chair-backs; skins tacked to the wall; and a magnificent tigerskin draped over the couch. The little brown man eyed it with reverence.

"*Shabash! That* was a *shikar*," he muttered, and with quick, slant eyes that flitted everywhere at once he set about coolly and critically to size up this most unusual *sahib* by the surroundings in which he lived. The result seemed to be favorable; for his dark eyes gleamed and he murmured below his breath—

"*Wallah*, this is a man!"

Westerman picked up a less virulent pipe than the one which he used out of doors and subsided angularly into one of his deep chairs. Motioning the man to another, he grunted laconically—

"Shoot."

But the other remained standing.

"First, *sahib*, as to myself. I am Bir-Jung, son of Shankar-Jung, of the village of Paliput in the *tehsil* of Srinagor in the district of Bhatgaon; lately *subadar* of the 2nd Gurkhas, having medals for the World War and the Mohmand War and the Chitral War, and being last stationed in the convict islands; from where, my time being accomplished, I took leave and came to this far country where the houses are as my own mountains of Himalaya. This in order that the *sahib* may know that my word is a true word."

With each succeeding item of his account he straightened up more and more and his voice rang firmer and more confident till with its culmination he stood proudly at attention. And indeed with his broad Mongol face fiercely alight and his little dark eyes glowing, displaying an almost squat squareness of jaw, it was abundantly evident that this man was no mere coolie or lascar riffraff run away from his ship in the harbor.

Westerman recognized the man's face now. A Gurkha from Nepal; one of those ferocious little mountaineers who came of that queer mingling of the best Rajput fighting stock with the sturdy Tibetan and who have maintained their independence in their mountain fastness against the British from the beginning of Anglo-Indian history. He motioned the man to a chair again.

"A *subadar* is entitled to sit. Sit, then, Bir-Jung, and tell the tale of the dagger with the fiery script. But tell me first, why do you come to *me* with the tale rather than to your own people, of whom the *serai* was full?"

The sonorous Hindustani came haltingly to his lips, but the man understood readily enough. He acknowledged the courtesy of the seat with a quick gleam in his dark eyes and perched awkwardly on the unaccustomed chair; he would have been more comfortable squatting like a yellow ape on his heels.

"*Sahib*," he said confidentially, "the reason is clear. First, I am a stranger, knowing not English, which is necessary in this quest; and second"—with conscious pride—"I am a Thakur of direct descent from the wanderers of Chitor. How then shall I trust these dogs of Bengalis who make monkey chatter in the eating-house?"

Westerman smiled hugely. He knew something of the racial hatreds of the Orient. The Gurkha continued with anxious eagerness now:

"Listen then to the tale, which begins in the house of Malka Bibi, the courtezan of the Sudhur Bazaar whom all Delhi knows, and ends only God knows where. In Delhi was one Khoda Bux, a *zemindar*, a petty princeling having a fat belly and a fatter purse, a very descendant of a milch goat; and by reason of the fact that the Beritish *sirkar* did not permit him to squeeze the last pice out of his tenants as did his grandfather, having also a hatred of the Englesi.

"Falling into the way of certain Bengali agitators with tongues smooth as the swine's grease on a country cart-wheel and being lured by the beauty of Malka, whose beauty was as the moon in the mountain mist and to whom these agitators secretly paid much money, madness seized him and he made oath to devote his grandfather's hoarded wealth to the cause of these same agitators who have a madness of their own anent the overthrow of the *sirkar*.

"These things, *sahib*, are open bazaar talk, of which the *sahibs* never hear anything. But there came one Smith *sahib*, a very terrible man having the strength of a wild buffalo and the voice of a ram in the rutting season, wherewith he consigned all people, even the *lat* governor *sahib*, to *jehannum*. Yet behind this show of bluster he hid the heart of a child and the cunning of a very old elephant. And this Smith *sahib* quarreled throughout all the bazaars and caused much riot, and no man knew the reason of his coming. But shortly these Bengali tongue-warriors began to disappear one by one till the smell of the bazaars began to be clean again; and finally disappeared, too, this mad princeling; and no man knew the manner of their going nor the place to which they went. This, too, is bazaar talk which is known to many.

"But the rest of the tale is known to none, only to me; and that by reason of God sending the fate upon me to be assigned as acting *subadar* major of the Gurkha guard to the country of Tapu, which the Englesi call the An-da-man Eye-lan's."

CHAPTER III

THE CONVICT ISLANDS

"OHO!"

Westerman's interest, which had nearly become extinct at all this petty bazaar gossip, was wide awake again.

"Andamans!"

Those isolated islands in the far Bay of Bengal about which so few people knew anything! For, of the many who went there none ever came back except a few officials of the Government—and they were reticent. Those grim islands to which the Indian Government sent their life-term convicts and gave them then practical freedom, guarded only by the encircling seas and by the ferocious, black-skinned pigmies who blew poisoned darts out of cane tubes at all strangers on sight! Those islands so full of dark mystery and stark misery, of which no more than the coastal fringe about the convict settlement has ever been explored owing to the dense jungle and the little black ape people who inhabit them.

So unusual an atmosphere of unknown romance shrouded these islands that Westerman wondered for a moment whether the man was lying for some obscure purpose; but the Gurkha was clearly an enthusiast on his topic. He was proceeding eagerly with his recital.

"Consider, now, *sahib*, what manifestation of the enduring beneficence of God came to me, being *subadar* of the guard in this very evil place. Being on a small duty in the stone quarry, my eyes fell one day upon whom but this petty princeling, lean now and well-conditioned, having lost his pendulous belly, but being in proportionate measure eaten up by his hate for the good *sirkar* that had brought him back to his health, than which no wealth is to be preferred.

"I therefore, having spurned him with my foot—for in his day of affluence in the house of Malka Bibi the dog had laid insult at my door, and for the cleansing of which pollution upon my foot I paid seven rupees to the head priest of the temple of Yabosh in Dhankote, who is a thief by heredity and a liar by instinct, though Yabosh is a very wise god—I made inquiry in this matter which had interest for me.

"This much, *sahib*, for the beginnings of the tale, which has wearied the heaven-born; but it was necessary by way of explanation. Now follows the tale of my inquiry, which leads to the road of loot, and, God being willing, will hold the *sahib* by his very heart-strings. Listen well, therefore. My inquiry by stealth brought forth this:

"In the islands of Tapu are confined many rebellious swine who have plotted to overthrow the *sirkar* of the Beritish. Chief among them is this Khoda Bux and one other who was; this latter a Bengali cow bearing the ape's name of Hari Chandra Chatterjee. These twain had been treasurers together in Delhi of the funds, the wealth of the *zemindar* coupled with such other moneys as other madmen subscribed from time to time to the cause. Being arch-scoundrels both, as well as low-caste cattle of the plains, they trusted one another not at all.

"Therefore—observe carefully now, *sahib*, for herein lies the meat of the tale—they caused to be fashioned two pretty toys, each the counterpart of the other, small and easy of concealment, and emblems besides of the reward of death for treachery. The one the *sahib* holds in his hand!"

Westerman looked at the dainty little weapon with a new interest. What absorbing details of plot and intrigue and counterplot the shimmering, phosphorescent thing could tell if only it could talk! What an inside knowledge that the soldier of the guard could never find out! But the Gurkha had details interesting enough.

"The other, *sahib*, is like this in every way except that the inscription of fire reads—

> "*Jâha bhaibundi miljai*
> "*Woha bhowani ahjai*"

which, being a cunning and innocent saying of the Vedas in itself, when read in conjunction with the other, concludes the command that only when the twain come together shall the keeper of the fund deliver up the treasure. This is a system of much merit when people of little honor have a joint charge. Thus, I am told, do the bankers of this country with the keys of their strong-boxes.

"Now, *sahib*, to finish the tale with speed. It was the fate of this Chatterjee that he was set to labor in a barrack building, in which work God, who is all-wise, looking upon him with disgust, let fall a beam upon him that he died. It happened further that the *salutri*, the horse-doctor to whom such cattle are consigned, found upon his carcass that other dagger and took it for a curio, having no knowledge of its significance.

"Thus also was *his* evil fate made clear; for it happened soon after that the doctor *sahib*, too, died—slain silently in the night. But of the dagger no trace was found; though secret emissaries made diligent inquiry, gaining admission as servants even in the houses of the Englesi officials. The half of the key thus was lost and the treasure rendered forever unattainable.

"Yet, *sahib*, I alone of all that assembly, being a true follower of our all-wise *raj guru*, by whose advice I made *puja* to all the gods of the valley before I crossed the black water, was under the especial favor of Fate, which was manifested by the fortune which came upon me to be assigned, by virtue of my trusted rank, as escort to a young miss *sahib*, a student of some obscure science, who was making departure from that country by steam vessel. And there upon the gang-plank of that vessel was the favor of God suddenly thrust upon me. For the marvel came to pass that it became known to me that the maiden bore with her no less a treasure than the dagger! The lost key, which the doctor *sahib*, who was enamored of her, had given her before his fate overtook him, as a pretty and curious bauble by which his memory might remain fresh in her mind."

"BY THE very heart-strings," the Gurkha had said.

And he had guessed closer than he knew. Westerman was leaning forward with parted lips and snapping eyes, nostrils wide and quivering, sniffing the "adventure" that he scented from afar. To the Gurkha the whole matter was but a tale of the prospect of loot to which his sublime faith in the various incantations he had made to a host of godlings and demons convinced him he was being guided by the hand of providence.

"Consider, *sahib*, the wonder of it!" he enthused. "Alas, that this so priceless knowledge came to me less than five minutes before the leaving of the ship! The reason of which thing is not known to me; but the wisdom of God is inscrutable. Who am I to question it?

"But my road was now clear before me. Intimate knowledge of this thing having been three times thrust in my path, and mine alone, the work which was ordained upon me was evident.

"Therefore, *sahib*—" Westerman could not refrain from grinning hugely at the simple naïveté of the man; but fortunately his face was in the shadow—"I sought meeting with this Khoda Bux. Him without more ado I beat about the head with a spade—a menial instrument for the cleansing of which I have duly paid to no less than the four-handed Vishnu of Bhatgaon—and took from him the dagger, the first half of the key, which the excellency now holds."

Westerman's sense of humor irresistibly impelled him to ask—

"How, O descendant of the Rajput wanderers, was this matter consistent with the honor of a *thakur?*"

The man's reply was splendidly simple and illuminating, as was his gesture of open-handed innocence.

"Excellency, I have said the man was a bazaar-fed swine of an up-country *zemindar;* what question of honor then was there in dealing summarily with such as he? But honor is to be observed where honor is due, as must be the case in the subsequent negotiation.

"Inquiry of endless patience and costly *puja* sacrifices made it clear to me in the course of time that the maiden holding the other half of the key came to this country of Am-ri-ca and that she dwells now in an abscure village of the name of Boh-ston; the name of the house, too, I have caused to be written upon a paper. Now, *sahib*——"

The inspired enthusiast paused to consider his words and then delivered his proposition with a confidence and certitude that was an astounding proof of his naive faith in a divine command. Was he not guided by a "call?"

"It is necessary, *sahib,* that this maiden be approached and that the other half of the key to the hidden treasure be acquired by purchase or by barter or by sympathy. For this work circumspection is necessary and straight dealing such as the *sahib*—I have made observation—knows.

"Also money; but that is but a drop; for, having obtained the whole key, we may go and demand according to the order scribed in the letters of fire, delivery of the treasure from its keeper. Of this man also and of his place I have knowledge. All the labors that came to me according to my guidance I have completed.

"*Bus,* my tale is finished, *sahib.* I wait the word of the excellency as to the ways and means he proposes to employ."

"Huh! What! The —— you do!"

Westerman was startled out of the fantastic reverie into which the recital with its brilliant lights and shades of Oriental color and of human passions had absorbed him.

"You don't care how much you take on a bet, do you!"

The dark adventurer smiled deprecatingly, spreading out his broad, muscular hands, pale palms uppermost, in the prescribed gesture of appeal, and added with an artlessness that was sublime—

"Consider also, *sahib,* this is moreover a holy work; for the secret fund of these rebellious dogs being removed, rebellion and much bloodshed will be avoided."

That was the last straw. Westerman had to shout his laughter aloud. The grave ex-*subadar* of the Second Gurkhas watched him with a patient tolerance. In his dealings with the British officers of his regiment he had long ago learned that the emotions and humors of the white men were forever beyond the ken of the native mind. He was satisfied that the *sahib* did not wish to insult him, and that was enough; so he sat and waited in grave courtesy. Finally Westerman articulated—

"Excuse me, *subadar.*"

And he showed then how the tale had gripped his interest by asking—

"How much do you figure this revolutionary fund amounts to?"

"Of that matter, *sahib,* I have no knowledge; but I should judge very great; for this Lalla Bux was the most insolent dog in all the bazaars of all Delhi; and with such folk of low breeding the measure of their insolence is gaged by the measure of their wealth."

"Hm-m-mm."

Westerman drifted again into a dark reverie. A vivid darkness full of hazy, fleeting pictures of fierce, brown faces and of fiery passions and of animal lusts. A darkness shot with the blazing colors of the East and with the white glare of sunlight. Quite unbeknownst to him his blood tingled with the hot lure of it. A door had been opened in the back of his forgotten memories and he was experiencing the call of the East. Out of the mists he spoke.

"Well, now, supposing I should go into this proposition, what arrangement would you want to make?"

The man rose and salaamed low—of which Westerman saw nothing—but the grave voice came to him from behind the hurrying pictures.

"Of that matter there need be no discussion. The *sahib* is a *sahib* having the ways of such *sahibs* as I have known in my regiment. The half of the key and the procuring of the other half and the subsequent arrangement for the use of the whole I place with mine own honor in honorable hands."

"Hm-m-m."

Came more pictures. Fanciful glimpses of a green tropic isle in a coral sea and of chained men and of little, black, implacable savages. Vague memories of something he had once read. He was roused out of this dream by the grave voice.

"How soon does the *sahib* start for this place known as Boh-ston?"

Westerman gave a sudden grunt and sprang from his chair out of his crowding dreams. He looked almost sheepish—if such an expression could ever be applied to his lean brown face. Then he grinned.

"Well, I guess if I hurry I could make that Midnight Flyer."

And on the Midnight Flyer it was that Ian Westerman, having spent not one complete day in the only city in all the world which he had sworn so vehemently to enjoy, started on the trail which began in the house of Malka Bibi the courtezan of Delhi and ended God knew where.

CHAPTER IV

THE OTHER HALF

HOWEVER, right blithely did Westerman start for Boston; just as blithely as he would have started for Tahiti or for Banjermasin—and with just as little notice—if anything of interest had suddenly cropped up. The only speck on his horizon was the prospect of finding the cryptic address which Bir Jung had so carefully sought and so diligently preserved. Scrawled on a piece of cartridge paper by some native letter-writer of the convict station, set down phonetically from the Gurkha's halting pronunciation of the unaccustomed syllables, it read—

Me-es Hell in a Imri,
593 Lick-sing-ting Istrit,
Abandel.

Westerman's thin whistle suddenly choked off in a soapy gurgle at the thought of presenting this cryptogram to a Bostonian letter-carrier and demanding an explanation. However, he knew enough of the usual native rendition of English syllables to locate the district as Auburndale, and he guessed the chop-suey-sounding street to be Lexington. Hell in a Imri remained a riddle till a directory disclosed that 593 Lexington Street was inhabited by a Professor H. Imray.

"Ha, Professor Imri *sahib!*" Westerman grinned to himself. "Guess the Hell thing would be his daughter—Helena, I suppose. Well, I should say my best play would be to call on the old gentleman and offer to buy the pretty toy."

Which of course he did. When on the following morning he had discovered the street and the house, he strode to the door, noticing too late that the place bore an almost forbidding aspect with the window-shades down and the lower shutters closed. A maid appeared in answer to his summons. She looked at his sun-browned face with hostile suspicion.

"Professor Imray is not at home," she announced with incisive brevity, and shut the door in his face.

Westerman, unaccustomed to calling on professors, attached no significance to the snappy shortness of his reception. He was rather glad as a matter of fact for an excuse to fritter away a few hours in the Boston district. He knew just where to fritter.

He strode from the door gleefully and made his way to the river, the beautiful, lazy Charles; and for the next four hours he astonished its languid canoeists by the queer way he knelt upright in the bottom of a canoe and the strenuous energy with which he propelled it, almost desecrating the placid habit of its bays and nooks.

After the lunch hour he approached the inhospitable door again. This time a man opened. Westerman did not know just how to place him; whether a servant or a relative; but he presented his card.

"Professor Imray?" he questioned.

The man looked sharply up into his face, and his demeanor was immediately more hostile than the maid's.

"No," he snapped. "And we don't want no more of your kind around here neither."

And once more the door slammed inhospitably in the caller's face.

Westerman withdrew, a little abashed, his lean brown fingers caressed his lean brown chin with a hard narrowing of the eyes. Even he began to recognize that he was being treated with a little less courtesy than was a caller's due.

"No more of my kind? What's the matter with my kind?" he asked himself; and he looked down at the coat, which hung loosely about his lean waist from the breadth of his shoulders, and the trousers, which bore many more than the knife crease of fashion. No clothes were ever immaculate upon him; but they were at least decently new. Half-unconsciously he drifted across the street with the instinctive idea forming in his mind that he must just watch for the coming of the professor as he would for the coming of any other big game, and then force an interview with as much tact as possible.

Fortunately the house was an easy one to watch; and fortunately, too, he had long experience in waiting for and stalking game of all sorts. It was late afternoon before his patience was rewarded. The door opened, and a ferrety-looking little man in advance middle age stood on the threshold. Obviously he had been at home all the time. Nor did he seem anxious to go out now. He only peered up and down the street with an air of irritable nervousness.

In three long strides Westerman was across the street. The old gentleman saw him coming and popped into the house again like a startled rabbit and slammed the door.

Westerman's conception of tact was quite typical. The bell-pull nearly came away in his hand with the vigor of his summons. While the last discordant tremolo of its jangle still echoed from the rear of the house the door suddenly opened again. The ferrety little man was quivering with anger, positive sparks shooting from reddish eyes under brows of an extraordinary bristliness accentuated by the powerful lenses of spectacles which he wore on his forehead.

"What the ——!"

Westerman's self-possession in the presence of hostility was the acme of blandness.

"Professor Imray?" he inquired with a genial smile.

The little man chattered at him with the dry stutter of a snake-hunting mongoose.

"I'm not at home. I won't see you. I— —— me, sir, by Jimmy, if you or any more of your kind come to my door again I shall call a policeman; —— me if I don't. And confound your impertinence; get out of my hall."

This because the tall, sun-browned man had in some mysterious way backed the owner into his own hall and stood smiling down at him with a smile that was angelic. The little man seemed to be infuriated to the point of shooting him.

But Westerman with his most ingratiating manner fished a soft leather roll from his pocket and slowly unwrapped it, eying humorously the professor, who stamped four short paces across the hall and back, hands clasped nervously behind him, sparsely grizzled head sunk forward, clucking peevishly to himself and shooting a malevolent sidewise glance every now and then at the deliberate package. The last fold unrolled at last, and the Gurkha's dagger glimmered with eerie, crawling light in the dim hall.

The little man's peevish cluckings suddenly choked off in a shriek of rage.

"That's mine!" he snapped with sudden fierce avidity. "Where did you get it? I've had it locked away ever since your snuff-colored gang began to infest my house. I tell you I won't part with it. That's once and for all."

Westerman's thoughts raced. "Gang," and, "infesting the house." There was the explanation to all that hostility toward sun-browned strangers. And there was also the unpleasant evidence that other people, brown people, had traced these ominous daggers which the Gurkha thought were a secret all his own. But all he said was:

"Exactly. That's just what I came to talk about. I suppose we'd better go in."

The professor, bewildered and quite nonplussed by this strange man's cool assurance, led the way through a wide, sliding door to a room the chief furnishings of which seemed to be ancient blocks of broken masonry, carved and fluted and chipped, and a battery of china closets filled with smaller shattered marbles and lumps of stone and a general charnel-house collection of antique thigh-bones and brain-caps and similar horrible relics. Available seating-space was sparse, and comfort there was none.

Westerman perched himself irreverently on a conveniently fractured prehistoric tombstone, worn smooth with the erosion of ages, which, had he but known it, was nothing less imposing than a section of a monolith from the temple of Pashti in Bubastis. Then he began with business-like briskness.

"My apology for intruding upon you, professor, is that I want to do a little business with you. I'd like to buy the dagger that your daughter brought from——"

The little man passed into a spasm.

"No, you don't!" he snapped with a sudden access of jealous hostility, leaping up and snatching for the dagger, which Westerman meekly surrendered. "You can't buy that for a hundred dollars! That's a rare antique, the value of which *you* could never appreciate. There's not another like it in the world!"

Westerman thought of the Gurkha's tale of the recent making of the twin keys; but he held his smile behind his cold eyes.

"You're sure about there being no other? Because I'd pay quite a bit more than——"

"Of course I am. Do you think I am a fool, young man? I know every collection of every catalog that's listed. This is a priceless specimen from the Mogul dynasty—" he was warming to his pedagogic style—"Akbar probably, or perhaps as late even as Jehangir; but not a day later. This inlay settles the date beyond a doubt, and the carved work on the hil— Huh—whup—wh—what the —— have you done to the hilt?"

The little antiquarian grasped the weapon in a nervous clutch and crouched in a paroxysm of irascibility, apparently on the point of precipitating himself upon the desecrator of a sacred relic. He adjusted his spectacles with a fevered hand and peered closely at the carved silver, looking for signs of file or hack-saw; and, finding none, his bewilderment transcended even his petulance.

"Wh-what have you done? What have you dared to do to the hilt? There were— It had *four* arms! It was a Hindu god. Vishnu with the sacred symbols of— Where's the— Wh-what?"

The voice spluttered off into infuriated stutterings.

Westerman's smile was slow and deliberate.

"I don't know where yours is, professor. But if you will be willing to listen to me I'm afraid that I shall prove to you that the thing is far from antique."

The professor looked at him with the horrified expression of one who hears sacrilege uttered against a holy relic. Then he rushed to a specimen-case, crying like a wounded bird as he fumbled with the lock. In another moment he stood comparing with wild-eyed wonder his "antique" with the one he had snatched from Westerman. It was the exact counterpart except that the carven figure of the hilt was a grotesque four-armed thing. Together they quivered and glowed in his hands like malignant live things.

"Wh—why, that's it! *That's* mine, all right! How the— Most remarkable! A miracle! I'll give you a hundred dollars for yours. But—" there came a wave of sudden suspicion—"wh-where did you get it?" as if Westerman must surely have burgled it from some priceless museum collection.

"Well, now."

Westerman settled himself on his relic of ancient Egypt for a long recital.

"It's a long story, professor; and if you'll sit still long enough I'll tell you the whole of it—or rather what I know of it, for it's a weird and wonderful yarn."

The scientist snorted explosively at the innuendo on his restlessness; but he lapsed into a stiffly uncomfortable chair and fell to comparing the two mystical daggers one with the other, rolling them over between his fingers to catch their glimmering scintillations, playing with them with the gleam of avaricious lust in his eyes as a miser might with gold and cocking a quick, hostile eye at Westerman every now and then to note the main issues of his tale.

But long before the tale was ended his attitude of aggressive antagonism slipped from him and he sat gripping his treasures in both hands, glowing eyes on Westerman's face, absorbed in the fantastic recital. When the last colorful twist of the tortuous intrigue had been spread before him Westerman concluded with:

"So you see, professor, why I want to buy your half of the key. And I'll pay— Well, I'll clean myself out to the limit."

THE professor still sat silent, absorbed, glowering into nothingness. At last he began to shake his head, slowly, dreamily at first; and then as conviction came upon him with jerky, nervous vigor till it seemed that his absurdly overweighted head must surely twist itself off from the leanly inadequate neck. But he suddenly averted the catastrophe to voice his decision.

"No, I can't do it." He announced with finality. "I don't know how much you can afford; but the thing is worth more to me than that; though God knows I need money to carry on my work."

And there was the fanatical enthusiasm of the collector in his face which was more irrevocably final than the strongest language could ever have been.

Westerman watched him with a sinking of the heart as he shuffled up and down the room, twining his fingers nervously behind his back, obviously struggling between his dominant passion and his need. Then suddenly he made a hopeful offer.

"Well, I can't afford an awful lot, professor, because I have to keep enough to finance this little filibuster; but I'll tell you what I'll do. If you'll take a gamble on this thing and will entrust me with your half of the key—don't give it to me, just *loan* it—I'll go out with the Gurkha, and if the whole thing's not a fairy tale, if we get anything at all, I'll split three ways with you and Jung."

The professor halted abruptly in his prowl and perked his head over his shoulder with the alertness of a raptorial bird as an idea began to take form. For a long minute he stood thus motionless, and then suddenly he wheeled and shot a bony nervous finger at Westerman.

"No, sir! I am unable to adjust my mind to the risks coincident with gambling, and your whole proposition impresses me as hare-brained and dangerous in the extreme. But I'll tell you what *I'll* do with you, young man, and my word is ab-so-lutely final; so don't try to argue with me. I'm straining every nerve to take up a lease from the Persian Government on the site of the Bandar-Azul mounds and to excavate. That is my ambition, my life work; but it needs money."

A paroxysm of helpless belligerence surged over him.

"By heaven, if I had money I'd show up these pettifogging professors, Hewitt and Peterson, those mountebanks, those quacks; *I'd* show them neolithic man. I'd get the specimens, by Jimmy. I'd——"

He restrained his philippic with an effort and fired his proposition at Westerman like a shell.

"I'll tell you what I'll do. I can not gamble; but I'll come into this thing on a partnership if you like."

He scowled his ready defiance.

"And, what's more, I'll come out with you and your Hindu to see that you don't bungle it, by Jimmy!"

He stood with legs astraddle, shrunken body tilted forward at a bellicose angle and scraggy head thrust yet farther out in pugnacious determination, the finality of which was beyond the least hope of weakening. Westerman felt distinctly the sheer fierce will-power of the man, and his heart warmed to it at the same time that it went cold at the thought of working in intimate association with the waspish little fanatic; to say nothing of his physical disability for such a task as the venture promised.

But he knew that there was no possible alternative. The little man's resolution was as the law of the Medes and Persians. He bowed, slowly, formally therefore in acquiescence.

"Very well, professor; since those are your terms I must needs accept."

The professor relaxed from his attitude of tense belligerence and suddenly blossomed out into genial hospitality.

"You accept? Good! Very good! I'm sure we shall get on together."

Westerman wondered whether he based his opinion on the conduct of the recent hostilities.

"You'd better stay to lunch then—if that idiot maid has thought to put up any lunch."

He threw his hands into the air in sudden complaint.

"Why is it," he demanded fiercely of his guest, "that only congenital imbeciles take domestic service in this town?"

Westerman wondered darkly whether domestics—and others—did not perhaps go crazy *after* coming into association with the archeologist. But he followed his host without a word.

Thus then it was arranged, the extraordinary partnership which seemed to be no more than a fitting combination for the whole extraordinary venture. A lean, hard, white man of the strenuous backwoods; a cheerfully bloodthirsty Gurkha; and a fanatical scientist from Boston. Three extraordinary men embarked on an extraordinary trail that began in the house of Malka the Delhi courtezan and ended God knew where.

CHAPTER VI

AN INTANGIBLE "BHOOTH"

STEAMER to Naples and thence direct to Bombay, while necessitating passage on what the caste-proud Gurkha called ships peopled by apes, was quicker than transportation by the more commodious English boats. So to Naples they went. Jung, whose Oriental soul overlooked not a single trick in matters of intrigue, traveled by his own request in the guise of a servant to the two white men.

"Lest there be suspicion and premature killing," he maintained with direct foreboding. "For in India, *sahibs*, there be but two peoples. The *sahibs*, who are heaven-born, the lords of all Hind; and the *desi*, who are of the country and are the servants of all *sahibs*. Friendship is not. Understanding is not. Partnership is not—excepting, of course, in the matter of trade, when a *sahib* for the sake of gain makes agreement of business with some other shopkeeper; and how shall a *thakur* of Bahatgaon consistently with his honor pose as a trader of merchandise? Better honorable service with men of honorable occupation."

As a servant then he had his lodging in some mysterious part of the ship which passengers have no knowledge of; and as the white men's attendant he prowled unquestioned among the upper decks and staterooms.

No suspicion there, of course. Nor was there any semblance of an Oriental among the swarthy hordes of the steerage where Jung watched so assiduously. Which was fortunate for the Oriental; for the Gurkha would undoubtedly have thrown him overboard on sheer suspicion. He was almost disappointed, disconsolate.

"*Sahibs*, it is not within reason," he insisted. "These dogs have knowledge, and they have wit. In proof whereof they have followed a trail which even I have all but lost upon many occasions. As a trail of writing upon paper may be erased with a very sharp knife, so must this trail be blotted out, here, before we reach the country of Hind, where no trail that leads to intrigue is ever hidden!"

Westerman stretched his shoulders till the big sinews cracked, and laughed.

"We've lost them," he said confidently. "I booked passage with elaborate ostentation on another boat and transferred at the last minute by telephone. There's nobody on board here; we're pretty sure of that. So I guess we've outwitted them."

Which was as much as Westerman knew about Orientals.

Bir Jung's knowledge was deeper. Nothing would persuade him that some particularly cunning spy was not on their trail; and he was grimly determined to eliminate that spy before the latter could communicate with his fellows in India.

Yet Naples, when they arrived, was peaceful—though more than one dark Southerner never knew how quietly he had been trailed and how closely he had come to violent extinction for no other reason than that he had the misfortune to have a remotely Oriental cast of countenance.

To Westerman fell all the labor of petty details of departure which always falls to the man who methodically, without noise or fuss, just does things; the smoothly running arrangements that are always just accepted without notice as belonging to the routine of travel—until the man falls sick.

Westerman happily did not fall sick. So that in three days the party was comfortably installed on a Florio Rubatino boat and was pounding and staggering through the Messina Straits. Comfortably because they were men who had never known comfort; the Rubatino being one of those lesser lines that go out East having invariably booked more passengers than their scanty accommodation provides for, and which serve wine with meals—and take the change out in food.

But the professor seldom knew what he was eating; and to Westerman food was just that much fuel for energy. As for the Gurkha; well, "*muckrani*," as he said, which was his way of expressing the national dish, was not a bad substitute for rice—when one traveled in evil countries where there was no rice, no pulse, no *ghee*, etc., etc.

At all events there were no Oriental spies on that boat. Jung had spent a day watching the gangway up to the last minute of departure, and, since passengers and crew totaled no more than one hundred and seventeen souls, even he was satisfied that no skulking conspirator had smuggled himself aboard.

Yet on the second day in the Red Sea, or the early night rather, when most of the passengers were on deck enjoying what they called cool night air, sucking noisily on those viciously potent, twisted stogies which necessitate that one should set one's ears back and pull, and which can be purchased in no other part of the globe except in Naples—Westerman's stateroom was searched! Rifled!

Nothing was taken—for there was nothing to take—in the cabin. But swiftly and silently the searcher or searchers had gone through every possible hiding-place. The suit-case had been turned out over the bunk. The cabin trunk, which had quite a decent lock and had been locked—Westerman was sure of that, because he placed no trust in his cabin mate—was open. Not forced; but either unlocked, which was unlikely; or very cleverly picked, which was a miracle considering the short time at the searcher's disposal; and the contents lay strewn all over the floor.

The trunk had contained nothing of particular value, yet sufficient to tempt any ordinary human being who had gone through all that trouble. A prism field-glass, for instance, and a first-class compass; and a Luger automatic. There they all lay upon the floor—though if any person who at all considered coming into conflict with "Iron" Westerman had foreseen the unwholesome speed and accuracy with which he could use that same automatic under stress of unusual need, and if that person had been an ordinary human being he surely would never have left it.

That the other man's half of the cabin was untouched was no criterion of anything. He just had nothing to search. He was some sort of importer of cigarets. Of Armenian extraction originally; but so blended through a couple of generations with Eurasian blood that it was now impossible to discern which evil quality predominated. He had taken a flying visit to Port Said on some matter of business and had quite obviously reasoned with himself: What need to burden one's self with luggage? What he possessed he wore. Lived in it; ate in it; slept in it. Though when he retired he did go so far as to take off his coat and his boots; and—he had never known socks—he left tracks on the cabin carpet like a bear.

The professor, called into consultation with the other two, snorted with indignation at the suggestion that perhaps after all one of the people who had attempted to get the dagger from his house in Boston might have been a white man, a paid agent less likely to excite attention than a Hindu.

"Rubbish, young man; rubbish! Am I a fool? Subconscious recollection. Spot him in a minute."

And the Gurkha backed him up.

"Nay, *sahib*. Never would they trust a white man with one particle of their plans. What? Conspirators against the Beritish *sirkar*, and call in any but their own caste to help. *Kabbhi nai*. Never; it is not possible."

"Well, who then?" demanded Westerman. "You swore there was never a Hindu on the ship."

The Gurkha looked delightedly awed. Though he had all the superstitions of his own mountain folk and some adapted from his intercourse with Christian and agnostic and heathen in many places, the fearsome thought thrilled him. Pitting his wits and his wicked knife and his own stark courage against unknown forces, occult or other wise, was his meat and his drink.

"*Bhooths!*" he pronounced his sober verdict.

"What the —— is *Bhooths*?" demanded Westerman testily.

He hated to find a problem that baffled him, blind at both ends, with nothing to take hold of and study and deduce and work out.

"Just so, *sahib*. Devils! *Nay, sahib*, laugh not. In India are many devils. And this man, the keeper of the treasure—Soma, he is called, has the power. A Sadhu of Siva in his aspect of Bhairava, the Terrible, is he. All the knowledge of Yoga is known to him. The power of the ink-pool, in which men, looking, grow faint and see things, is his. The power of voices that speak out of the dark is his. Power of vision at the far ends of the earth is his. But one eye has he in his head. The other he keeps in a pouch with other magics, and when need arises he sends it to travel to all places, from which, having seen, it returns and tells him all things.

"Nay, *sahib*, this is no matter for jest"—Westerman was grinning at the serious recital. "Myself have I seen him send it through the air, and myself have I heard it talk to him out of the empty air and bring news, true news."

"Hm! A versatile sort of a vaudevillian," Westerman explained to the professor. "A palmist and a ventriloquist and a hypnotist and deuce knows what else."

"Rubbish, pure rubbish! What's all that to do with searching your cabin? As a humble claimant to be a scientist I know there's a material explanation. If you don't bungle it you can find out the explanation. Does he want us to believe that the man goes into trance and sends an ectoplasmic spook to pick locks?"

Westerman slid his length deep into a deck-chair, placed his feet in solid comfort on the top rail of the bulwark, lit his pipe and tried to translate ectoplasmic spooks into Hindustani. The Gurkha caught his meaning with surprizing quickness. To his people these obscure theories which the Western world speculates over have been practical realities for a thousand years.

"Exactly so, *sahib*. A *Sending*. This Soma has the power which is known to all Yogi, of sending the lesser spirits which have not yet attained to human form to far places to do his bidding. Assuming for that purpose whatsoever form he is pleased to bestow upon them."

The professor, when he understood, snorted again.

"Well, it's up to you young men to keep your eyes open and catch these spooks. I am quite sure that no ghost will search my cabin."

And yet, while that very conversation was being carried on, Professor Hezekiah Imray's cabin was very thoroughly searched!

WESTERMAN would have said nothing about it; he would rather have played their hand alone; but the professor's rage was beyond bounds. To the steward he stormed. To the chief officer, whose business it was none of. To the saloon waiters. To the captain. Upon all of them he vented his wrath, spluttering and stuttering like one of those extraordinarily inefficient single-cylinder motors that run the gravel-mixers of street repair departments.

And they waved their arms and stamped up and down and did setting-up exercises and shouted back at him till they drowned out his complaints with sheer volume of sound and motion. The Gurkha watched with the extremity of disfavor.

"With their heads and their hands and their feet do they talk. *Awah!* Of such mouthings comes no profit, *sahib*. In my country is a saying that he who accomplishes goes silently. You and I, *sahib*. We must watch with great wariness and capture this Sending. Then, being frustrated, it must by the law of such things return and work harm to the sender."

Which occult wisdom seems to be the original of our old saw about curses coming home to roost—which in turn may have a meaning perhaps deeper than we know.

"There remains to be searched my small belongings," he continued grimly. "Cold iron, it is said, is an amulet. Amongst my gear is iron, shaped as a bow—which is also a charm—and having a very keen edge. Perchance that Sending will go home as twins and work—who knows?—perchance double harm."

Bir Jung's small belongings contained nothing but a few clothes and his heavy, crooked kookerie knife, which was to him an instrument more potent than his religion. Perhaps cold iron *was* an amulet. Possibly the wicked curve of the blade *was* a charm. At any rate the *bhooth* did not search that bundle.

Instead it searched the pockets of Westerman's clothes while he took his morning tub. Yet Westerman would have sworn that the Armeno-Eurasian was in the cabin all the time. Being kicked, he awoke, muttering owlishly.

"Whatt should I know, Misterr Westerrman? Nobodee was here. Yett I am a verree heavee sleeper. The stew-ard perhaps—how can I tell?"

The speech of the *pucca* Eurasian is indistinguishable from that of the Bengali babu, and is indeed no more than Hindustani intonation and inflection applied to English words. Westerman felt sure that the man was innocent; that he *had* been asleep. But the mystery remained. Who was this spy clever enough to escape even the Gurkha's keen scrutiny, and yet be in a position to slip in and out of passengers' staterooms at will? The thing was baffling, perplexing. It annoyed Westerman to distraction.

Jung of the mountain folk cheerfully accepted the Sending theory. *Bhooths*, he said, could pass everywhere unseen; and it was well known that many varieties materialized only when people were asleep—and then they usually came and sat upon the sleeper's chest and tried to choke him to death before he could wake. Their voices, though, could always be heard, whether materialized or not. Many people had heard *bhooths* talking to each other in their favorite haunts—on the treetops and in wells and under bridges and so on; though they could rarely understand their speech.

It was the voice of this queer *bhooth* then that Westerman heard. It was past midnight, and he stood alone leaning over the bulwark of the boat-deck and watching the white-hot stars in their vast sweep across the sky, lulled by the night and the comparative coolness and the throb of the engines that always seemed to be playing rag-time on that old ship and never quite getting on to the time.

He was cogitating, since that occupation of star-gazing on board of ship is always conducive of reflection, of this extraordinary adventure which had seemed to him at the outset—granted that one were willing to believe the wild story at all—to consist mainly of the difficulty of gaining possession of the other dagger. The Gurkha had already done all the exciting preliminary work—after which all that remained was to go and collect the loot, which, according to the story, *must* be delivered up as soon as both the daggers, the two keys, were presented to the keeper. It needed no more than a little financing, that was all.

And yet—*had* all the exciting work been done already? Here in the very inception of the journey there was this mystifying spook who searched cabins. Was it—might it possibly be—some uncanny trick of Oriental mysticism?

It was then that the voice came to him. Not a loud voice and not a particularly spooky voice, though there was a queer falsetto sort of break in it; a quite unforgettable voice. There came one of those fleeting silences that occur on board ship, when the engines seem for a moment or two to have swung into their stride and their pounding fades then into a muffled hum, and the waves just don't happen to be breaking, and the wind has met some cross-current and is not whistling past one's ears. Out of the momentary lull came the voice floating up clear and distinct from directly below him. It spoke in Hindustani.

"Assuredly then it must be the old ram who carries them on——"

That was all. There came a quick shift of the wind. The waves that had been hanging over, listening, all broke at once. The engines heaved and thudded mightily to catch up lost time. And the rest of the speech was lost.

Westerman wasted no time in conjecture, and very nearly no time in finding out. Decks and companion ladders and bulkhead doors were things that took time to negotiate; and spooks, from all that he had heard of them, took no time at all to go away from a place.

Hardly had the last words been drowned in the general uproar than Westerman was swinging a long leg over the bulwark rail. Like a gaunt wraith himself he slid down a stanchion to the main deck and from that immediately again to the cargo deck, from which the voice had seemed to him to emanate.

He found a pair of lean, long-barreled race-horses. Beautiful, highly bred, nervous creatures, to whom the din and racket and confusion of a sea voyage were an obvious agony. And—in direct anthithesis—a chunky, comfortable-bellied English groom. A plain, very low-bred, stolid creature, who regarded him with drowsy hostility.

" 'Ere, watch aht, cahn't yer?" the man grumbled, rousing himself to chirrup to the startled animals. "Wot the bloomin' —— yer come a-shinnin' dahn like a monkey up a pole? Whoa, Belle; steady, nah. Whoa there, Sir Pat. *'Ere* you, Johnny! Watch aht there! Ain't yer got *no* sense?"

This sudden outbreak to the Gurkha, whose violent arrival from some dark post of observation of his own had carried him almost into the stalls, his eyes ablaze with excitement.

"Come aht o' that. Get in among them 'oofs an' they'll spread yer guts 'arf over the 'ole —— ship."

Westerman looked at the man; and at his appearance the perplexity of the last few days grew a hundredfold. This man was ignorant and coarse, but as stolidly honest as the day; the last person perhaps in the world to be mixed up with a Hindu conspiracy; and quite surely the last to lend any countenance to the conversation of *bhooths*.

Had he seen—was there any Oriental sort of person around there just about half a minute ago? The man just stared in owlish wonder. At Westerman's tactful inquiry whether he might possibly have been asleep he waxed colorfully indignant. Gorblimey and so 'elp 'im ——, wasn't he standing his turn of watch over them there expensive animals, Belle Haven of Somewhere and Sir Patrick of Somethings-or-Other-Else? in keeping with the extraordinary names that men give to race-horses and blooded dogs. Sleep? Not 'im' 'Strewth!

But whether he slept or no, it was abundantly clear that he could tell them nothing at all. The mystery had but deepened. But Bir Jung said no; why should a *bhooth*, and an obviously clever *bhooth*, permit himself to be caught at a disadvantage like that? Which, of course, was logic irrefutable.

The professor next morning was less complimentary.

"Hmm! Psha! Bungled it! Had him almost in your view and let him escape. What good does it do you to be young and active? What's that Jung person for?"

Westerman had grown actually to like this ferocious old man who had accumulated so much useless scientific knowledge and who had such a stout heart and such indomitable reserve in such a frail frame. Grinning at the insulting tirade with real enjoyment, he left the professor to his irrefutable triumph and went to consult with Bir Jung about precautions for the future; though as he said to Jung:

"It seems that this cunning guy—this Sending of yours, I mean—has looked through about all there is to search. Mebbe it'll let up on us for a few days now."

"Assuredly, *sahib*. There will be peace for a period. Yet one thing bewilders me. This Sending having searched with such efficiency and having found nothing, my being is filled with wonder as to where the *sahib* has hidden the twain daggers."

Westerman grinned as he opened his shirt and showed a soft leather strap coming from his right shoulder and another across his chest.

"What we call in my country a shoulder holster," he explained. "They're wrapped in oilskin, and I never take it off."

"*Shabash!* Oh-ho, it is well done! Surely was that Sending foiled. And that sign, the cross; it is the magic amulet of the *Chiristiani;* doubtless that too has helped."

A happy thought came to this student of religious mysticism.

"Perchance, *sahib*," he added hopefully, "the evil power, being frustrated, returns to work harm upon the Sender. Who can say? At all events, for a period there will be peace."

And it was true. There was no further disturbance. The ship docked at Bombay without another sign or a sound of the mysterious spook.

Yet for all that Bir Jung spent a whole day, crouched like a lynx on a barrel-top, and watched every last passenger leaving the ship; and after them such of the crew as could obtain shore leave—and then he went back on board to fetch something he had forgotten and hunted for it from the upper decks down to the bilge. Just to make sure, he said, that his dealings had been with no human agency.

CHAPTER VII

"HAVING THE KEYS, HE *MUST* DELIVER"

IN BOMBAY the professor announced that he himself would take charge of affairs. It was quite evidently necessary that, if they were to succeed in their quest, somebody would have to be at the head of affairs who would not bungle things. He had been dean of some college or other at some time and he had entirely absorbed the usual pedagogic conviction that his sheer administrative genius alone had kept the institution on its feet. He inaugurated his administration by accusing Bir Jung of treachery. He told Westerman about it and gave him much good advice.

"What's the use of telling me the man looks honest? You'd stake your life on his integrity? *I* am a trained observer—" the initial and exclusive boast of all scientists over all the world. "This morning when you went out with the usual confident carelessness of callow youth"—Westerman was just around thirty—"I observed this Jung sneaking out and slinking up the street after you. His every action was full of suspicion."

"But why?" wailed Westerman. "Why should he turn on us? He has everything to gain by playing straight."

"Aa-h! Don't talk rubbish to me, young man. Try to cultivate the habit of observation and deduction. He needed you, us, to gain possession of the second dagger. He is now in his own country, among his own people. That should be clear even to a numskull. Besides, an honest man does not act like a detective."

Which was all that the professor knew about Gurkhas. Bir Jung's own mountain country was a thousand miles from there, and he would have felt just as insulted at being miscalled a Bombay-side man as a Highlander is at being called English, and he would have trusted them rather less. Westerman's ingrained creed was: All cards on the table between friends.

"Let's call him and hear his end," he said.

And against all the prof's urgent counsel he did.

Jung evinced neither surprize nor indignation. He quoted a proverb of his people.

"He who has much knowledge about great things has no knowledge of little things. You and I, *sahib*, we understand. I knew that the *sahib* observed that I followed."

Westerman could not help grinning at the professor.

"What need of speech between us? How shall one catch a spy except by following to observe if one spies?"

It was so simple that even a very wise man could believe. The professor's administrative ambition turned after that to telephoning about railroad tickets and discovering that in India there do not exist any express companies to handle trunks; that one went out into the street and caught a passing *byle gharri*, an ox-cart, and paid the man thirty cents to haul trunks all day long.

Then somebody told him about the caves on Elephanta Island which contained temples so old that Hinduism was still young when they were carved from the living rock and half the gods had not been invented yet. After that he forgot his ambition and everything else and left the loose strings of his efforts to be picked up by whoever would, and went and tried to lease a hut on Elephanta Island. None of which, of course, made any difference at all to Westerman's quiet arrangements at any time.

Bir Jung caught no spies in Bombay. It was possible, of course, that some super-cunning trailer had at the very outset spotted him, and had then shown his discretion by giving up all hope of following Westerman. But the Gurkha was satisfied. There was no spy. The thing had been indeed a Sending.

Delhi was the next objective. Delhi and house of Karim Bux in the street of Tuttikhana in the bazaar of Maila Talao where dwelt Soma, the *mahayogi*, the keeper of the treasure find. They traveled in the delightful, cumberous, inefficient Indian manner.

Trunks—in case something in them *might* be required—came into the first-class compartment of the train with them. So did vast numbers of small packages; for in spite of Westerman's Spartan simplicity of baggage, packages just seemed to grow—hat-boxes, for instance; and all the ancient moth-eaten things that the professor had seen and instantly bought—and their name was legion; and hampers of food.

For in Indian trains at seasonable intervals one's own servants enter and spread a table-cloth and serve elaborate meals designated by unwholesome names. *Chota hazri*, meaning little breakfast, which consists of stodgy oatmeals and the inevitable marmalade. Shortly thereafter *Burra hazri*, which is big breakfast and does not belie its name. Then *tiffin*, which is a whole hard-working man's midday meal, and inaugurates the open season for the whisky peg.

Many white men in India make it a rule not to drink before *tiffin*—and then they make up for lost time. Others place no such handicap upon themselves. Later tea of course—and of course whisky peg. Then dinner—and whisky peg. For it is very hot in trains and everywhere else.

An observer as astute as the professor found no difficulty in deducing the reason why all Anglo-India is dyspeptic and suffers from torpid liver. It is from India by way of the first big passenger steamers that the system of feeding on ship-board has spread over all the world.

It will be seen that a first-class compartment with seating room for eight accommodates with difficulty more than two real experienced travelers with all their impedimenta and camp-followers. And on top of it all comes the bedding. Everybody in India carries his own bedding. Sheets and pillows and mattresses, a bale of them; and his servants come in again after dinner and make up the sleeping accommodations. It has always been so. What chance has Pullman against the custom of the East?

Bir Jung, traveling still as the white men's servant, found ample opportunity to drill Westerman in his future conduct. They were coming now to conditions which Westerman knew nothing about; which no white man knew for that matter. And he took his instructions with proper humility.

"Tomorrow we arrive, *sahib*," the Gurkha said; chanted rather with a holy zeal. "The day after, by the favor of the gods, who have assuredly directed us, we seek this Soma, bearing the twin keys. Then by the instructions which he has and by the sacred law which is upon him, he must perforce deliver up the treasure. Yet there are observances to be observed and precautions against too great a suspicion on his part.

"That the *sahib* is a white man occasions difficulty. For, the sacred symbol of the two daggers notwithstanding, never would the keeper deliver up the treasure of conspirators against the *sirkar*, to an Englesi, an Englishman. How, then, shall we persuade him that the *sahib* is not an Englesi, an agent of the *sirkar?* The gods have put into my mind this plan. The *sahib* shall say that he is a *subyut* conspiring with the conspirators."

He looked like a delighted child for approval. But—

"What the deuce sort of a bug is a *subyut?*" demanded Westerman.

"The *sahib* does not know? *Tscha-a!* A *subyut* is another breed of conspirator. There are many in the land; an unclean breed, talking thickly with the tongue like the splashing of sewage from a city drain. From the country of the Russ they come, and they stir up the ignorant to arise and throw the yoke of their masters from off their shoulders."

"Ha! Soviet! Of course!"

Westerman shouted his recognition of the strange word.

"A Bolshevik I'm to be. Bully idea! Sure, why not?"

"Exactly so, *sahib*. As a *subyut* then we approach him with a plausible tale. Yet in the approaching is etiquet to be observed, lest he be angered. For this Soma is a *mahayogi*, a *Shivaista Brahmin* of the order of *Dandis*—the staff-bearers. Three horizontal marks does he wear upon his forehead. For the approach to such a man by the lower castes are rules prescribed. Now I, *sahib*—" there was the ingrained pride of centuries in his bearing—"I am a *thakur* of Bhatgaon. I may stand before him as an equal."

"Hm. And what am I?" grunted Westerman.

The Gurkha's tone was apologetic. "Thus are the rules, *sahib*. A *nayar* may stand before him and converse; his touch, however, is pollution. A *kammala* may not approach closer than twenty-four feet. A *pulaya* or a *cheruma* must halt respectfully at forty-eight feet, while a *pariah*, who eats dead flesh and even beef, pollutes from sixty-four feet."

"Holy saints of heraldry! And where do I come in? From which line do I talk to this blooded heir of the ages?"

"*Sahib*—let the *sahib* be not angry; these be observances of caste—white men, *Chiristiani*, must stand somewhere beyond sixty-four feet."

"Beyond sixt—! Say, this wizard of yours must be little brother to the Archangel Gabriel. But you just make it clear to him that he'll have to sink all ideas of royal etiquet for our little palaver. I'm telling you right now that I'm not going to advertise our business to the world from a distance of sixty-four feet. It looks like a few hundred people know too much about it already. I'm not going to do it, and that's all there is to it."

"*Aahtcha-tcha-tcha-tcha.* That is pity, *sahib*. Of this I had fear. Yet since the *sahib* is as all *sahibs*, having no reason in this matter, we must needs risk his anger and make excuse on the plea of ignorance."

"You're durn right we must. I'm willing to be set down for a Bolshevik, but for all that I talk to this bird just the same as though he were an ordinary human or I don't talk at all."

"Since the *sahib* is set, alas, let it be so. Yet there is one precaution. Since it is necessary that the keeper of the treasure should not suspect that the *sahib* be not a dog of a Eurasian *subyut*, from now on the *sahib* must refrain from washing himself; and I shall take out again from the laundry-bag a shirt and collar for the *sahib*."

CHAPTER VIII

A THIN TRAIL INDEED

DELHI. The decrepit hag among cities whose fate it is to be the capital of the East. The chief city, first of a long line of rajas; then of Mogul emperors; then of rajas again. Growing older all the time and never repaired.

Then Fate grew tired of rajas and they ceased to plot and quarrel and hoard, and there followed somnolent desuetude. Then again Fate turned the Indian Government mad, and they rooted themselves out of their capital of three hundred years and transferred the seat of Government with all its vast mess of archives and clerks and officials and palatial buildings to house them all, from Calcutta back to Delhi once more at a cost of twenty-nine millions of rupees.

The Maila Talao, which means the foul tank, was one of the city reservoirs of the grand old days of Delhi's glory; the days when men relied for their drinking-water during the dry season upon whatever rain God in his goodness was pleased to send during the monsoon; the good old departed days which the seditionists preach about—when men died in their thousands of whatever epidemic God in his inscrutable wisdom was pleased to send.

The bazaar which grew up over the filled-in area in these deplorable, degenerate days of the British and water pipes and sanitation is a section of the city which few white men, entrenched behind their incurious aloofness, have ever visited. The street of Tuttikhana is not the narrowest street in Delhi; yet it is sufficiently so to give contentment to the heart of the native, who is never really happy in a wide thoroughfare where he can hurry.

Sixteen feet from wall to wall, of which four of either side were devoted to sidewalk—a ridiculous and disgraceful state of affairs, the *bazaar-wallahs* grumbled, and it was the undoubted duty of the *sirkar* to do something about it; for how can a merchant display his wares with any decency on only four feet of sidewalk and find place besides for himself to crouch on a mat behind them? This injustice on the part of their callous rulers forced patrons to stand in the gutter while they bargained.

To traverse the street of Tuttikhana was for a *Byle Gharri*, a journey of one hour. Why should shoppers and other pedestrians who desired to talk in groups move out of the way of mere ox-carts? What was time to oxen anyway?

The two foreigners trod their way through the slow-moving crowd with circumspection. Westerman, long, lean, half a head above the seething average, taking in with narrowed eyes and wide nostrils every new sight and smell. Bronzed and unkempt as Bir Jung's insistence could make him, he might have passed as some unusually vigorous Eurasian, and he did not attract undue attention. Unconsciously he repeated to himself a scrap of the wisdom of the greatest observer of India of all time:

> "For to admire and for to see, for to be'old this
> world so wide
> It never done no good to me, but I can't drop it
> if I tried."

And he had not the faintest idea that this song about the bred-in-the-bone adventurer described himself exactly. He was admiring and seeing and be'olding; and his nostrils quivered and the gray eyes became thin slits in the glare and he smiled at all the world.

The Gurkha, just as much of an outlander in that crowd, was in direct antithesis. Short, broad, nearly as wide across the shoulder as the white man but with the mighty calves and chest of the hillman. Eyes dark, eagerly questing and fierce with scorn for the mob, he cared nothing for sights or smells or sounds. His whole being was set on the house of Karim Bux and on its single mysterious guest.

"Observe, *sahib*. That is the house, the one with the pink balustrade and green shutters to the upper windows. On this side are shops of such folk as deal in merchandise, an ignoble appearance, it is true. But within is a court, deep and dark; like a temple it is, and there in a cell dwells this Soma, bringing much honor to the man Karim Bux, who is by reason of the same an overbearing dog who may be beaten without pollution, being himself a Brahmin.

"Surely have the gods led us upon this our quest, *sahib*. Wasting no time, we shall beard this sender of Sendings in his very den and demand our treasure of which we bear the keys. Nearly have we come to the end of the trail. A narrow trail it has been in parts, yet not without amusement; and on the whole easy; for when the gods themselves direct, all things are assured."

Westerman's thoughts had not been on the treasure so much as on all the absorbing new impressions which he was drinking in. Reminded of the real aim of this adventure by the Gurkha's almost holy exultation, he came back to earth and grunted:

"Hmh. Hope it's going to be as easy as you think. For myself I can hardly imagine that this unapproachable old rainmaker will cough up more than twenty or thirty pounds of the jewelry without a little moral persuasion right heftily applied upon the psychological spot."

"Nay, *sahib*, be of good cheer," the Gurkha assured him. "The hand of the gods has been apparent throughout this venture."

To gain admission to the house of Karim Bux, honored by the presence of the *mahayogi*, the great ascetic, was surprizingly easy—and the interview was surprizingly short. The owner himself opened the door to them. He was a portly man, the style of whose turban as well as the bulgy, thick-lidded, rather bloodshot eyes and the heavy lower lip proclaimed him a *madhesia* of Central India; a man whom Bir Jung would call a *kala admi*, a black man.

The Gurkha thrust past him with a studied *hauteur* that even his fear of offending the mighty star boarder could not control.

"We would have speech with the holy one," he ordered curtly.

The man looked at the pair with that peculiar offensiveness that seems to come so naturally to that thick-eyed type. He looked long, to let the force of his coming disclosure gather weight. Then he leered a loose-lipped grin.

"The holy one has gone these many months," he chuckled. "And no man knows the place of his going!"

Smash! That was his momentous jest; and he rolled his head from side to side and laughed loud in the enjoyment of it. That he spoke other than truth never entered into the mind of either. There was too genuine an appreciation of the joke.

Westerman thrust his hands deep into his pockets and grunted with calm finality.

"Hm! Then we've just got to hustle and find him."

He had hardly expected the thing to fall easily into their hands; and it was a matter for conjecture whether he was any too much overcome with grief at the prospect of having to pursue the quest a little farther.

Bir Jung recovered from the shock as rapidly, but his reaction was startlingly different. His manner toward the *kala admi* changed from mere rudeness to active hostility.

"So-o?" he all but sang, thrusting his overhung brows so suddenly close to the other's face that the pendulous laugh was sucked in with an apprehensive breath. "The holy one is no longer your guest? Ha? Truly am I favored by my gods this day! Dost remember, then, thou offal, that upon a certain day thou didst spit upon the ground before my feet, taking then shelter in the shadow of the holy one? For that, thou carrion, in mine own country across the border would I stuff thy entrails into thine own rain-pipes. Here, alack, under the protection of the *sirkar* I can but beat thee near to the death."

Which he did forthwith, while Westerman braced his back against the outer door and remained deaf to the clamor of the curious from without.

They passed out, the one so coldly grim and the other so cheerfully bloodthirsty that a silence fell upon the little knot of officious loiterers and they made room without hindrance. Out among the wider streets again Westerman said dryly to the Gurkha:

"That part of it was very properly done, Bir Jung. But it seems to me that those gods of yours have let the trail pretty durn near peter out. Seem to have fallen down on the deal somewhere."

The Gurkha's denial was immediate and illuminating.

"Nay, *sahib*. The present is but a postponement. What matter that the keeper of the treasure is gone? That we find him is sure; for to Jahala and to Yabosh and to Zimri did I but yesterday make the triple sacrifice. Three goats; and with a single stroke of the kookerie did the head of each fall, showing that the gods were well satisfied."

And Westerman shrugged and agreed. What matter indeed? Since the keys are safe—and they were getting a heap of excitement.

CHAPTER IX

SOMA, THE ONE-EYED

TO FOLLOW the ill-assorted three on their hunt for the lost trail would be wearisome. It would seem a hopeless task to trace a religious mendicant through a land of three hundred and forty million souls of whom some half-million are *fakirs* of some cult of other. But Bir Jung had a plan, and withal a very simple one.

"To Sri Ganesa, the Elephant-Headed,

the All-Wise One, I gave a goat and six pounds of clarified butter," he explained. "And into my head he put this plan—Ganesa having little regard for the priests, who pay him small honor, I will go therefore to the nearest *Shivaista shadu* and to him I shall say that I have a great sin upon my soul which I must needs confess to this Soma and obtain from him purification. And the *shadu*, having first tried to persuade me that he can purify as well as the next—for they are all alike, these priests, all grasping—will, when he finds that I am set in my way, give me information to further me on my pilgrimage to a brother in the craft."

A simple and logical course of reasoning. And it worked. In this matter Westerman could be of no use, and the professor no more of a hindrance than usual. All they could do was to wait patiently for the Gurkha—who in spite of his strange mountain godlings and devils was basically a Hindu—to carry his tale of mortal sin from one fanatical devotee to the next, and to follow them where the trail led.

Bir Jung was put to it for a while to devise some crime of sufficient horror to necessitate his purification at the hands of none other than the one whom he sought. He eventually evolved a dark and deadly tale of having in a moment of passion, induced by an evil spirit, slain a *nandi*, a sacred bull consecrated to Siva, which holy animal had been in the keeping of the god's highly favored servant, Soma. After that many *shadus* purified the ground upon which he had trodden and drove him from their doors with all the information they possessed about the wanderings of the one man who could lift the horrible curse from his shoulders.

To Allahabad, where the *mahayogi* had officiated in the great sacrificial *puja* ceremony of Kali, the Black One, the wife of Siva in her most terrible form. To Cawnpore; and from there all the way to Jaganath Puri, where the *Shivaista* priest had attended the great car festival, the Juggernaut—probably with the object of winning away some of the fanatical devotees of the rival god Krishna to his own yet more fanatical cult.

Thence by devious ways to Calcutta. In Calcutta at last the trail seemed to come to a head. Inquiry brought forth immediate and gratifying knowledge.

The *yogi* with but one eye, the miracle-worker? Assuredly. He lived in the dark purlieus of the old Durga temple by the waterfront of the Nimak Ghat.

It would be wrong to say that all was excitement in the camp of the three treasure-hunters. The professor was merely in a bad humor. He had been dragged through every single one of the oldest cities in India, dumped down for just long enough to begin to find out about priceless antiquities, and then snatched up and away again by these soulless "youngsters" just as he was beginning to feel his way about. All he wanted now was to get his share of the loot and be left in peace.

Westerman's reaction appeared to be more an ingrained desire to flout and to outrage the hereditary exclusiveness of this high Brahmin than to kowtow to him and persuade him to deliver the hoarded revolutionary fund. Entrenched authority always aroused in his inherently informal nature an aggressive desire to trample upon the barriers.

Bir Jung, of course, was filled with a sublime certainty and a holy zeal. With the naïveté of a child he hugged himself in anticipation and could not refrain from planning castles in the air about what he would do with his share and demanding of Westerman what he proposed to do with his.

Westerman's reply was always mathematically consistent: "Li'l ol' N'Yawk and one hi-yu time," and his high-bridged nose would wrinkle with appreciation of the savory thought, and he would draw a deep breath into his lungs as if sniffing already the joyous scents of the Great Multicolored Way.

And Bir Jung would say:

"Indeed, *sahib*, that is strange. I had thought that the *sahib* would purchase for himself a small but well-equipped army and would come forth into some far place to conquer some tribe or other."

A shrewd observer of men was Bir Jung the Gurkha.

The morrow was set for the small formality of presenting the keys and bringing home the bacon.

They left the professor in the hotel, and the two sallied forth, Westerman unarmed, but the Gurkha with his great war kookerie in its silver-bound sheath thrust proudly through his cummerbund sash. For, while the Government does not permit natives of India to carry arms, Bir Jung, as a subject of the free kingdom of Nepal, was permitted to carry his national weapon and was always at great pains to do so, lest the common herd should mistake him for other than a Gurkha, and a *thakur* of Bhatgaon.

The *mahayogi* was not difficult to find. Everybody knew the old temple of Durga. Westerman was almost disappointed to find that there were no formalities to trample under foot.

A gaunt *chela*, a disciple, who sat at the gate upon a plank closely studded with nails, points uppermost, the staff and the tongs of the *dandis* across his knees, pretended to be so absorbed in abstruse meditation as to be unaware of their presence. But Bir Jung dropped a silver four-anna piece into the upturned human brain pan beside him and cried aloud that a great sinner desired purification.

The man dragged himself out of his trance with vast effort and turned heavily bloodshot eyes up to them; he was semi-stupefied with *churrus*, which explained his insensibility to the nail-points. It required a considerable time for the request for an interview to soak into his dulled senses. Then he rose heavily and disappeared into the dimness beyond, from which he returned presently and beckoned in silence.

The way led through dim courts, acrid with the smoke of burning cow-dung, and passages from which eyes peered, to a great vaulted chamber from which more passages opened out into further gloom. A dark, eerie place, full of startling echoes.

On a raised platform of brick, clay-plastered and painted red with *khun-kharabi*, and having at each corner a smooth oval stone daubed saffron at the upper end, the symbol of the *linga*, crouched a man cross-legged, his hands, palms uppermost, resting on his thighs, head thrown back in rapt attention, motionless except that he nodded from time to time in understanding of voices which came from the dark vault above.

Bir Jung hesitated, fingering the iron slug, the amulet which hung from his neck, and muttered:

"Assuredly this place is inhabited by devils with whom the holy one holds converse."

Westerman strode truculently forward, bound from the outset that there should be no misunderstanding about the distance from which he was going to talk with the wizard. Bir Jung loyally followed.

Not a sign of recognition from the man. He threw his head yet farther back, listening up into the ceiling, and nodded with increased vigor as the voice multiplied and spoke in many tongues. Westerman had opportunity to take stock of him.

Like his *chela* at the gate the master was gaunt and parchment-skinned. The staff and the tongs lay at his side. His hair, according to the oath, was matted with the dirt of years. He wore only a *lungi*, little better than a mere gee-string. On his upper arms and his thighs were the three horizontal ash smears of the *Bhairava*, and on his chest in blazing ocher the *Sivastica*, the mark of Siva—which is exactly the same as the swastica, and provides matter for speculation for such as are interested in the theory of ancient intercontinental communication.

When he had kept the suppliants before his throne waiting long enough the *yogi* nodded with final vehemence and spoke at the ceiling in a voice astonishingly deep for so emaciated a frame.

"Ye have done well," he rumbled. "Go, and perform my further bidding."

Then slowly, with immense dramatic effect, he permitted his head to lower itself and rolled his single eye-ball at the mere mortals who came to parley with so great a magician, glowering from under his fringe of matted hair like an animal from a cave.

BIR JUNG, though among his people fear was a strange emotion which women knew about, was awe-struck. Of what avail against bodiless spirits was even the sharpest and heaviest kookerie knife? He stammered introductory phrases which never got further than—

"O holy one, and great lord, and heaven-born."

Westerman with studied unceremony took the speech out of his mouth.

"We've a deal to put through with you about which you've got your instructions. We come as agents——"

Bir Jung recovered his wits at the white man's scornful regard of spirit voices and hastened to tone down the disrespect of Westerman's speech.

"As emissaries we come, O holy one," he broke in; and after that he emended and translated and explained away everything that Westerman said. "Emissaries of certain ones who are in Delhi."

The *yogi's* understanding was immediate and startling.

"Of certain ones who were and then who were not? And of whose going no man knew? Ho-ho-ho!"

He rumbled sepulchral mirth.

"As the smoke from a fire half-lit they melted away and were gone: and in the bazaars was much talk; but none could say, 'To such and such a city they went,' or, 'Such a one saw them in another place.'

"Yet I, Soma, old though I am, and having but one eye, *I* saw. I can say, if the bearers be men of perception, 'Lo, to such and such a country across the black water they went.' "

He fixed his baleful glare upon Bir Jung and commanded:

"Tell me then, man who hast come from the island, of that fire that was half-lit, that made but a little smoke, but which will burn brightly yet. Ho-ho, it will burn in its appointed day, and all Hind shall be hidden in the smoke thereof. A mighty smoke. That smoke I see; with mine other eye which is closed to the outer world I see it; it is surely there. A great smoke, and a red.

"But beyond the smoke—*aie,* who is beyond that smoke? Who has survived? Alack; that I can not see for the very thickness of the smoke."

He brushed his hand across his eyes as if to wipe away the troubled vision and glared once again at the two. Bir Jung was properly impressed. He clutched his amulet again and muttered—

"The holy one knows all things."

Westerman had to take up the tale.

"Well, since you know, we can cut things a little shorter. They're there in the convict settlement all right. Some have died; but Khoda Bux, the leader, lives. Without his leadership the little fire that has just smoldered along so far will die in its very youth. Theref——"

The *yogi* sensed Westerman's antagonism and retaliated by deliberately ignoring him. He pointed his eye at Bir Jung.

"Who is this tall *Feringhee?*" he asked.

Bir Jung made haste to explain.

"He is a *subyut,* O holy one. A trusted agent of the Russ *log;* and he is one of us. Behold, my father, the plan is this:

"We have made arrangements to steal away from those accursed Islands of Tapu our leader and as many of our adherents as may be possible. In a small ship with sails we must travel the black water for ten days, maybe twenty. Alas then, who among our people knows the way of a ship where no land is? None. Therefore is this *subyut* coming with us who knows all the ways of a ship.

"Yet for this purpose, O holy one, much money is necessary. Wherefore we be the appointed agents to bring the keys to the keeper of the fund and to take the delivery of that which was laid aside for dire need."

It was a clever story. Plausible in every way and test-proof. The *yogi* despite his trained mastery over all emotions, showed excitement. He was trembling and chuckling ghoulishly to himself.

"Ah, the keys! If ye indeed have the keys. Then will I believe. The keys, ho-ho-ho! Show me the keys with the many little fires glowing within them. Little fires that will blaze into a mighty pyre. A funeral pyre, ho-ho! The keys with the sacred words. Bring me the keys; and by the sacred words of fire upon them must I deliver up that holy trust whereof I am the keeper."

Westerman took a little leather roll from his pocket; and never a tremor of his hand or a muscle of his hard face showed what he might be feeling. The dagger which Bir Jung had taken from the chief conspirator shimmered first in the gloom, the silver haft with the folded arms. The *yogi* shot out a long claw and snatched at it. His piercing eye swiftly took in every detail of identity, and immediately he prostrated himself before it, lowering his forehead to the dust. His voice took on a drone of a litany and he chanted in the *Rekhta,* the pure Hindi of poetry:

"It is the key! The true key and none other! The dagger of holy Brahma! The words of the Lord himself!

> "When the hour has come, then the time is accomplished!

"The mystic words of Brahma, the Creator of all things made. The first of the keys!"

He rocked his body back and forth in an ecstasy, and with eyes closed he held out his long claw again. Westerman placed the other dagger in it, the queer, four-armed thing.

This time the priest hardly looked at it. He felt with quick fingers and thrust the point into the stamped clay so that it stood upright alongside of the other and gleamed its message of crawling flame. Again he beat his head in the dust.

"The key of Vishnu, the Father of Knowledge! Vishnu the Four-Handed! Preserver of All things Made! I read the mystic words of wisdom—

"When the time is accomplished, then all things are prepared!

"The words of Vishnu. The second of the keys!"

Still rocking in an ecstasy of religious fervor and with his crafty, deep-seamed old face almost transformed—he held out his skinny claw once more!

Westerman had been almost hypnotized by the weird performance. He had been watching, tense, carried far away from the practical, every-day world. Now he came back with a start, and even his passionless heart skipped a beat. His instant glance met the Gurkha's startled query. There was no answer. They just stood and looked at each other.

Then the terrible eye slowly opened and glared malevolently upon them. For a few minutes he held them literally spellbound. Westerman admitted later that it sapped the manhood from him and left him a small boy, fearful before a head master.

A full minute it glared vindictively; and then malignant humor began to glimmer from these glowing depths. The ventral chuckles began to grumble around the vaulted space. They increased in volume and force till the gaunt body rocked again, but this time with a horrible laughter.

"Ho-ho-ho-ho! Emissaries? Ha-ha! Agents? The mule said to the money-lender—'Give me your capital, for I am a banker.'

"*Awah!* Aho-ho-ho-hawr-hawr-hrh!"

A fleshless arm shot out and thrust a taloned claw accusingly in their faces.

"Fools! Fools! Princes among fools!"

And the vaulted echoes shouted back—

"Fools."

"The dagger of Brahma is there, and the dagger of Vishnu is there. But the dagger of Siva? Where is the symbol of Siva the Destroyer? Siva Mahadeva, the greatest of them all?

"Where is the third of the keys to complete the whole, the unified principle of all power? How shall two become one? *Three* are the Trimurti. Brahma the Creator, Vishnu the Preserver and Siva the Destroyer."

The fanatic beat his head in the dust and was chanting again:

"Creation, Preservation, Destruction. Birth, Life, Death. The wheel without beginning and without end. The mystery of all existence. The unfoldment of all Nature.

"Three are the Principles. The Three who come together and merge into the One. The Om. The Brahm. The Perfection! The One Who is Three. The Three Who are the Perfected One!

"Where, then, is the perfected key? the completed symbol of power to command me? Fools! Little children among fools! Ho-ho-ho! Fools whose fathers were fools!"

And the fools could do nothing but look at each other and at the horrible old ghoul who mocked them.

"Did I not know from the beginning? And ye sought to deceive *me!* Old Soma, Soma the one-eyed. The keeper of the trust. Ho-ho-ho!

"Did I not know even before the failure to deliver the whole of the holy symbol? Emissaries of those who are in the islands? Ha-ha! The one a Gurkha and the other a pretended *subyut*. Am I a fool too?

"*Subyuts* are many in the land, promising revolution and wealth and women for all, but performing nothing. I know the breed. But when did a *subyut* ever stand and look one straight in the eye as a man? And when was a Gurkha ever untrue?"

The old wizard's keen observation was a condemnation in itself.

"That such a twain should hope that I should deliver up to them the trust! *Awah! Shabash!* What an effrontery! Ho-ho! Yet *if* ye had indeed the keys the mystic symbol of the Three, even to you would I be bound to deliver.

"But have no fear. The fund will be delivered to none. For the third key, the dagger of Siva the Destroyer, is lost! Lost are the words of power. For the man, Rais Dost, the third of the liberators who bore the third key, has ceased to be, and no man knows of his ceasing, not even I who know all things. Ho-ho! It is a jest, a tale worth the telling. *Hawr-hawr-hwr hwr hr hr!*"

A paroxysm of goblin joy at this greatest of all jests overcame the old fanatic, and he rocked himself in unholy ecstasy and choked and coughed up frothy saliva while he shouted and gurgled:

"Lost! Lost! For all time!"

And:

"Fools! Fathers of fools!"

And the chuckling echoes took up the shrieks of "fools" and "lost" and threw taunts back and forth in the gloomy heights and gurgled: "Fools! Fathers of fools!" in the whispering corridors that led into the haunted dimness. Truly a place inhabited by devils.

The two stood in creepy horror and listened to their own denunciation.

"Fools! Fools! Ho-ho-ho-ho!" came to them from a distant passage in a queer, high-pitched falsetto that carried a note of remembrance. And then the spell was broken.

Westerman shot a quick look at the Gurkha, and as before met the alert question in his eyes. Again came the distant chuckle:

"Fools! Ha-ho-ho-ho!"

Once too often. Bir Jung's face magically regained its accustomed grimness.

"There at least is a devil whom we know," he growled. "On the ship it eluded us. In its own house perhaps it may be less careful."

And he darted with soundless bare feet down the dim corridor.

Westerman's first impression was to follow. But, ever coldly methodical, he reflected on his noisy boots. He looked at the old *fakir* still cluckling in a sort of fit. His eye lit on the two daggers glimmering evilly side by side, and he stretched a long arm and gathered them in.

Then he looked for a good place from which to put up the fight that he expected would surely come as the aftermath of all this outcry. An angle of the wall near the entering passage looked like a strategic point, and he backed grimly into it.

But no fight came. Evidently in this old deserted temple, inhabited only by transient mendicants, the spellbinding tricks of the old *yogi* drew no attention from the brothers in the craft.

Quick, padding feet sounded from the right, and Westerman gathered himself together for the struggle against naked fanatics and curved knives gleaming in the dark which the tales he had heard across more than one camp-fire told him to expect. But it was only Bir Jung. The high-cheeked, Mongoloid face was grinning like a cheerful yellow idol, just as if a vast treasure had not been snatched but a moment ago from their confident expectation. Apparently a great weight of awesome mystery had been lifted from his mind.

"It was but a rat," he explained happily. "A rat, with the face of a rat and the voice of a rat. Not even sight of the blade was necessary. With his throat in my hand he told me all. In the horse-feed of that very stupid groom had he been hiding in comfort and security. Having told it, and his purpose in life being thus accomplished, it was his fate to leap from me and to fall into the swift-running water. Come, let us go from this evil place of stinks."

As they threaded their way through the twisty whispering passage Westerman mused upon the fortuitous circumstance of that fall. Outside in the blinding sunlight once more he remarked dryly to his still grinning companion:

"Looks like this Yabosh-Zimri combine fell down on the deal too, doesn't it? If you ask me they just gobbled your goats and then failed to deliver the goods. This little expedish looks like it's way up a high tree."

"Nay, *sahib*," he answered earnestly. "Was not their hand apparent in that that spy who has remained so cleverly on our track since the *sahib's* own country, fell so fortunately in the river where the current is very swift among the slippery piles? Else had we been burdened for all time with a prisoner who knew too much.

"Be of good cheer. The favor of the gods is with us; and the trail which is lost even to that great wizard is a clear road to the gods—to whom I shall donate this very night a fighting ram of proven metal."

And even Westerman was forced to grin. He shrugged his wide shoulders, free from care, as he cast his mind forward on that trail that had begun in the house of Malka the courtezan, and ended only the gods knew where; and he murmured whimsically—

"And in the meanwhile, old scout, it's mighty good hunting; what?"

CHAPTER X

A HUNTER OF BIRDS' NESTS

IMMEDIATE council of war with the professor was the urgent need of the moment. For though, as Westerman hinted dryly, the professor would be as useful as any other pedagog in discussion, it was no more than his right as a partner in the venture to decide how far into the dark maze of intrigue he was prepared to follow this twisted trail; and it was no more than courteous to give him the pleasure of heaving a scornful insult upon the "youngsters" for not having discovered in advance that there existed a third symbolic dagger intricately bound up with the other two in some mystical relationship with the Hindu concept of Trinity and Unity, and consequent command over the fanatical keeper of the so well-guarded revolutionary fund.

As for himself Westerman had already decided when he stood in the dark angle of the temple with set teeth expecting an attack, that he was going to see this goldurned wild-goose chase through to a finish. Ultimate loot or no loot, he had come too far to be dissuaded by mysterious spies or ghoulish ventriloquists; or even by the rather important fact that the trail had petered out to nothing. Bir Jung, of course, was actuated by a sort of *jehad*, a holy mission.

But when they came to the hotel the professor had disappeared. Into thin air apparently. He had left no word. Nobody had seen him go. The manager knew nothing.

Westerman was baffled. So many unexpected things happened in this mysterious country of which he knew but the white man's surface! But to Bir Jung the problem was more simple.

"*Sahib*," he expatiated sagely, "it has become apparent that the trail is a rope of many ravelings. One thin thread have we. The others spread in many directions like a mountain stream that has reached the sandy plain. When one trickle has been eaten up by the sand, by going to the original stream one picks up the course of another.

"Where then was the rope made? In Delhi. Now, *sahib*, the servant of the hotel who keeps this corridor proclaims by his speech that he is a Delhi man."

For Westerman the lead was sufficient. Without a word of further question he strode from the room and went in search of the man from Delhi. He found him squatting on his heels with a group of other servants in the rear purlieus of the hotel, engaged in the pleasant occupation of chewing betel-nut and passing a *hookah* from hand to hand. Still without a word he closed a sinewy hand over the man's upper arm and lifted.

Immediately silence fell over the chattering group and their faces set in the Oriental mask of stolidity. Perhaps they all knew something. Perhaps it was no more than their hereditary prelude to denial of all knowledge.

Westerman wasted no time in speculation. In cold silence he returned to his room, and the man who was attached to the end of his long arm drifted with him.

Bir Jung was engaged in a pleasant occupation too. He seemed to be amusing himself juggling with his kookerie. Like a fast club-swinger he whirled the thing up and down and over his shoulder and up his back in intricate arcs and twists; and he spun it up in the air, a singing wheel of light, and shot out his muscular hand again in the exact fraction of time to receive the hilt in his palm with a soft slap. His mastery over the thing was fascinatingly suggestive.

Westerman was quick to grasp the value of the effect. With ominous quiet he shut and locked the door. Then without any hurry he seated himself on the edge of the table, and in a passionless monotone suggestive of inexorable resolve he said—

"You see, it's necessary to know where the professor *sahib* went."

Bir Jung snatched his whirling steel out of the air and shot it into its sheath with a single motion. He advanced, as was a trick of his, on his toes with his knees bent, and added the corollary:

"And that swiftly and without subterfuge."

So of course the man told all he knew with laudable brevity. It was not much. Only that one had come from the establishment of one Kasin who kept a Delhi shop in the Chandi Bazaar, and the professor had hastened out to buy something of great value.

Westerman opened the door again and

threw the man sprawling all the way down the corridor. Then the two looked at each other and grinned.

"Good teamwork, Jung," commended Westerman.

"Nay, *sahib*, that problem was easy. Now a Delhi shop, *sahib*, is where the unscrupulous sell curios to the simple. It would seem then that there is ready explanation for the old one's going."

"Hm! Too durn ready. If the professor just went out to buy some antique junk, why all the secrecy? Why didn't anybody know? Coincidence? No, sir! There's some little crowd keeping so close in step with our trail that I can almost feel them. I would, 's a matter of fact, if they weren't just a shade ahead of us most of the time. Why, those birds seem to know in advance just about what we're going to do! Guess we'd better loaf over to this Kasim novelty emporium and rescue friend professor."

Long before they reached the shop of Kasim they saw the professor, safe and sound, standing upon a carpeted platform of the stall and attracting a guffawing crowd by his bargaining.

"Let us watch a while," said the ever-cautious Gurkha, "and perhaps see faces worthy of remembrance."

And so it was that they intruded themselves into the picture too late to hear a priceless piece of conversation. The professor was trying desperately to persuade the man Kasim to sell him a queer-looking instrument. It was old, of course; a heavy shears sort of thing made of hand-wrought iron. A gigantic pair of pincers, rather, with shallow cup-shaped jaws set close to the fulcrum, and a rawhide thong, stiff and cracked with age, connecting the ends of the long handles. A stick was thrust through the double thong for the obvious purpose of twisting tight and thereby exerting an enormous pressure upon the jaws. Kasim was explaining the use of the machine with gusto.

"Thatt, sar, is nut-cracker. In old days before the *sirkar* interfered with custom of country, when it was becoming necessary for tax-collector of raja to extract information of hidden rupees, he was putting the head of debtor in the chancery; and by squeezing, confession was coming forth. If there was no rupees to confess, then by more squeezing the head was going kurr-rr-rak like coconut. Look, with nut I will show."

The professor was dancing with exasperated impatience.

"Confound your demonstration! I don't want to see a monkey cracking nuts. I want to buy the thing. *Kitna rupee?* How much?"

Kasim was desolated. He smote his breast and wept. But he was possessed of an examplary and overpowering sense of duty and responsibility.

"Alas, sar! My fate is evil. Willingly would I sell my own daughters to gentlemen of such venerable knowledge. But this thing I can not do. This is family relic of antique heredity. This is property of my cousin's brother-in-law's uncle, one Rais Dost, a very estimable man who by false witnesses was unjustly accused of a small crime and was sent by the *sirkar* to the convict islands. Without his permit how can I sell sentimental family relic?"

And he remained obdurate. The professor pleaded with him and chattered and hopped on one leg and dropped rupees about in profligate abundance. The man's eyes glittered; but he remained steadfast.

If the professor could in some way, in any way, gain the written permission of this convict in the Andaman Islands, he would joyfully deliver up the specimen for no cost whatever. But without permission—alas and a thousand regrets, his *izzat*, his sacred honor, rendered it utterly impossible to break his trust.

It was at this juncture that the other two came up and dragged the professor away before he should assault the man. Dragged him away raving and champing with his jaws.

The most interesting specimen he had ever met, he foamed. Absolutely unique. Nothing like it was listed in any of the collections, and he must have it. Willy-nilly, by hook or crook, his must be the honor of presenting the beautiful thing to the museum with an exhaustive monograph on its obvious uses, probable antiquity and possible history.

And as they went up the glaring street and began to be lost in the dust haze another man came out of the gloom from the rear of the shop and frowned conjecturingly after them.

"What think you, brother?" he asked at length of Kasim.

"They will go," replied the other without hesitation. "The old one is assuredly mad, and the lure of this useless iron will lead him. That other, the tall one, will go in any case, for he is like the hunting-dog of the Dekkan, lean and hungry for strife, which never leaves a trail till either quarry or hunter be dead. As for the Gurkha, *ashavass!* All Gurkhas are devils—may the Terrible One eat them up.

"Assuredly, brother, they go to the islands. And then—who can tell?"

"Aye, who can tell?" growled the other. "Yet the chief is a bold and a clever man, and the brethren are many."

He chewed with dark introspection upon a quid of *pan-supari*. Then he lifted an ornate brass vase from the floor, spat a red stream of juice into it and delivered himself of the verdict.

"It is in my mind that the keys will come to their own again; and this Soma—may his own Lord Siva rend him asunder for a mule-headed ascetic fool!—will at length reveal where he has hidden the fund. And then—ah, then, brother, who can tell?"

THE courtesy extended to the professor of heaping contumely upon the youthful two-thirds of the partnership was well appreciated. The professor took full advantage of it. They had bungled the whole deal, of course.

It was obvious to any really deductive mind that the man Soma had the third dagger himself. Anybody but a pair of half-grown incompetents would have known that and would have taken it away from him.

And if by any chance he had not had it, then that other man, the spy who had followed them on the steamer and searched their belongings, surely knew all about it. Why had they not caught him and made him confess?

The name of the man who had held the third key and who, as Soma said, had been obliterated out of the landscape, conveyed nothing to his mind. All coons sounded alike to him.

There was nothing to do but to accept the pungent homily with a good grace just as any other schoolboys would have done; and to set out then and try to pick up the lost trail.

And that was a labor which Hercules himself would have balked at. Among three hundred and forty millions, where was one to begin?

To go to the stream head and investigate men with a Delhi accent did not appreciably reduce the problem. Calcutta city swarmed with Delhi men, and only such as seemed to intrude themselves into the seekers' immediate orbit could be investigated.

The Delhi men who had business in the hotel, and the unsuspecting pedlers of carved brasses and embroideries and lace who haunt every place where travelers congregate led a hectic life during the next few days. Peaceful souls most of them, they fled to their rabbit-warren huts in the Golrasta section of the city with wild tales of two homicidal maniacs who ravened about the hotel searching whom they might devour.

But not a trace. Not the thinnest thread of a trail. Bir Jung's indefatigable inquiries led him eventually to the friends of friends who had known the obscure yet priceless Rais Dost; thence to actual relations. To them he said that he owed a debt to the man which he wanted to pay off.

That incentive—in a land where corpses to select from could be produced at an hour's notice to prove any trumped up murder charge—should have produced Rais Dost from his grave. But no Lazarus came forth, though one astute Mahratta—who are the wooden-nutmeg fakers of India—brought forth a very creditable counterfeit and very nearly got the money.

The professor fumed and stormed. He was anxious to be up and doing.

"It might occur to any moron with a mental coefficient of about seven to look up your man in the death records and make sure of that at least," he snorted acidly.

But in India it is problematical whether the Almighty, Who knows when each sparrow falls to the ground, can keep track of native deaths. Relatives were helpless with the apathy of the East. How should they know whether he had died? In Calcutta city three thousand people died every day of cholera alone upon six hours' notice and were quickly half-burned and shoved into the river within the next hour. How, indeed, should they know? He had just failed to show up one day, that was all.

Conference and council of war was the only and quite futile thing to do, held more with the idea of encouraging one another than with any hope of arriving at an inspiration. The professor stamped peevishly up and down, his low-hung head almost overbalancing his body, twiddling his fingers behind his back and firing acrid comment upon the art of bungling developed to the *n*th degree. Westerman sat on the edge of the table and smoked a rank pipe and swung his legs and grinned amiably at the professor. The Gurkha squatted with his back against a trunk and radiated unquenchable faith in the favor of a list of gods who had eaten by actual count eleven goats, three rams, nearly twenty pounds of *ghee* and a mess of pigeons and brightly-colored rags.

It is one of the hall-marks of a nervous temperament that when it is passing through one of its spasms, it becomes irritated the more at calmness in others. It is probably one of the mysterious workings of that inferiority-complex thing.

The professor stamped, then emitted peevish noises and shot malevolent glances at his unruffled partners from over his spectacles. Suddenly his exasperation overflowed. He wheeled and thrust his long finger at each of them in turn and delivered his ultimatum.

"Now listen to me, young men. I can not sit here and waste any more time while you foozle about looking for this man. My time is valuable. I have work to do. So you can stay here just as long as you like and talk to Delhi men.

"*I* am going to the Andaman Islands. I've *got* to acquire that instrument of torture; and that thyroid-deficient cretin in the bazaar insists that I must get permission from some other imbecile called Rais Dost who is in prison there. So that's final. You can do what you like. I'm going to the islands."

Slowly Westerman's swinging legs came to a stop. His hands gripped the table edge for support, and slowly his pipe died, while with inverse ratio of speed his mind raced back over events, reconstructing, deducing, guessing, till the whole little game lay clear before him.

There was the explanation of that preposterous story about having to obtain permission from a man in the islands. Why, it was as clear as day that they had been meant to go there from the very outset! For just what purpose he could not fathom just then. But that speculation could wait for later.

Sorrowfully he turned his gaze upon Bir Jung, whom he found looking at him with much the same expression.

" 'Then I looked up at Nye, and Nye looked up at me,' " he quoted.

Bir Jung understood nothing of the reference but he very perfectly understood the situation.

"What's that?" the professor snapped. "What foolishness are you saying?"

Westerman spoke to him soothingly and with vast patience.

"I was just saying, professor *sahib,* that we're all going to the Andaman Islands. And we're not going to foozle around here another minute. We're going right away."

And with that decided upon it became very urgently incumbent upon Westerman to find a means of ingress into the Islands. A matter which was not quite so easy as just purchasing a steamer ticket. For there are no tickets to be purchased. The Andaman Islands—or to be more strict Port Blair, the convict settlement—were a vast Government colony under the supervision of the Department of Prisons, and nobody had any business there at all.

Once a month the Government ran a ship from Madras conveying the latest crop of convicts and supplies for the settlement. Once a month similarly from Rangoon. And since the islands lay isolated far out of the radius of steamship lanes and trade routes the only other ship that ever saw their coast was the Royal Indian Marine patrol-boat which nosed about their beautiful bays and backwaters from time to time to see that no other ship was nosing about.

The situation, then, taxed Westerman's ingenuity more than a little. Yet within a very few days he showed up at the sumptuous office of a gentleman whose title was D. G. Prisons. To him he lied with smooth fantasy.

"I want to take up as little of your valuable time as possible, Mr. Director," he said briskly. "So I'm going to put my proposition before you in three sentences. I represent the Chicago and Mid-Western Drug Syndicate. Our chemists believe that they can extract a valuable drug out of the nests of *Collocalia fuciphaga.* Will you sell me the concession on the east shore cliffs of South Andaman for this season?"

The director general was constrained to take off his spectacles and wipe them while he took breath. This was exactly what his popular literature had taught him to expect of keen American business. Having wiped his glasses carefully twice and re-adjusted them on his nose, he found himself able to articulate:

"Oh, ah—drug syndicate. Hm! Well, er—if you, er——"

He was too much of a gentleman to suggest suspicion by asking for credentials. But Westerman knew, and produced them.

An over-ornate card with too much printing on it. A blatant letterhead with fancy type and half-tone block of a bearded person in a smock peering through a test tube, beginning, "To Whom It May Concern" and ending, "Will be deeply appreciated by the undersigned." All of it was exactly what the director general expected. In India a native press will print anything at all and thereafter keep its mouth shut—to white men.

Yet since the first impulse of the official mind is to find the difficulty, he objected—

"Well, now, er—this concession has been taken up for the last few years by a Chinaman who—"

"I know," interrupted Westerman. "I'll hire him as my foreman and utilize his own organization of six coolies for collecting."

There was no resisting this dynamic force. A few other feeble objections were as breezily overcome, and before the director general was well aware of it he was signing a letter to the chief commissioner of Port Blair authorizing Westerman accompanied by a servant to land on the island and collect edible swifts' nests wherever he might find them.

The case of the professor was more difficult. Westerman racked his brains to think of some means of squeezing him into the combination. For a brief moment he dallied with the idea of representing him as an expert chemical analyst; but he shrank from the thought of the thousand bad breaks which that erratic gentleman could make when confronted with a Bunsen lamp and a rack of test-tubes. He decided to place the difficulty before the professor and to ask him what he thought he might pass himself off as. The professor was genuinely surprized.

"Difficulty? What difficulty? Why pass myself off as anything? Isn't there a museum in this town?"

There was. The professor trotted off to it and sent his card in to the curator. There ensued some running back and forth of uniformed messengers, and two hours later he came home with a letter signed by the Viceroy of India recommending Professor Hezekiah Imray to the personal consideration of the commissioner of the Andaman Islands. Westerman began to have a feeling that this funny little man was somebody in that small scientific orbit which the rest of the universe knows so little about.

CHAPTER XI

PRISONERS WITHOUT BARS

FIVE days later saw them steam into a little fairy harbor of deep, clear, green water through which one could see flashes of darting light chasing each other in a game of rainbow tag; chased in turn by longer, thinner rainbows; then emptiness against the yellow sand while a long gray shape floated slowly under the keel.

On their left was high ground, a horseshoe hill studded with giant trees, fringed along the shore with palms, and with green lawn-grass right down to the water's edge. On either horn of the horseshoe, about midway from the end, stood a noble granite castle with turrets and battlements and escarpments complete. Nestling in the hollow beyond a clean white beach was a tiny and extraordinarily neat settlement of cheerfully painted frame houses. The whole picture was one of the private estate of a millionaire abutting on the private estate of a multimillionaire.

Alas for the falsehood of appearances!

One of the splendid edifices was the male prison; and the other the female prison.

On the right, planted in the very jaws of the horseshoe and forming by its protective position a still-water harbor, no matter what cyclone might be tearing up the bed of the Indian Ocean outside, was a little steep-sided island, perhaps half a mile long. Through the restful green of its mango and padouk and jack-fruit trees peeked wide verandas and dormer windows and overhanging balconies with orchids swinging from the beams; and high up toward the left the gray spire of a tiny Gothic church.

An emerald isle of delightful residences in a tropic sea. Ross Island, where the white officials of the settlement lived, protected by deep water from any possible outbreak on the part of the convicts, and guarded further by three companies of native infantry. An ideal situation.

Low down along the waterfront was a little model dock from which a steam launch puffed out to take the three passengers ashore. The crew, including master and engineer, were natives of India. They wore neat-looking, clean, white-cotton uniforms—and iron rings around their necks.

Rigorous etiquet demanded that strangers call immediately upon the chief commissioner and crave an audience with that very lofty autocrat. Westerman received something of a jolt to his democratic self-respect when the professor was granted an immediate audience while he was left waiting the great man's pleasure. It was his first contact with Anglo-Indian officialdom from a position other than that of accepted respectability, and it left him indignant and resentful.

The professor, properly introduced by a brother member of the sacred Indian Civil Service—the heaven-born, which advocates of Indian autonomy attack as the entrenched stronghold of overpaid imported officialdom—was immediately accepted as a fellow human and a gentleman, and lavished with all the hospitality that an English gentleman is capable of. The ceremony of acceptance began with the whisky peg of peace—presented by a soft-footed servant with an iron ring around his neck—and ended with the commissioner placing a room in his own house and a personal servant at his guest's disposal, and putting him up for transient membership at the club.

Westerman, accorded an interview later, was received with the perfection of graceful courtesy; and there the reception ceased. He was given no whisky peg, and was relegated to quarters in the official *dak-bungalow,* the plainly furnished lodging-house for strangers. Nor was a man with an iron ring assigned to him as a personal attendant.

Not that he considered that any hardship; for he was one of those self-sufficient beings who have lived so long in wild places that all the things which need doing they just naturally do for themselves. Furthermore he was too new to this extraordinary community to regard with complete equanimity the idea of being under the constant surveillance, one might almost say, of a man who had committed some unknown crime of sufficient heinousness to cause his conviction to prison for life.

The officials resident in the place have long grown used to the idea. Life-termers wait upon them; hardened burglars keep house for them; desperate criminals serve their meals; murderers cook for them. But some time elapses before a newcomer relaxes the instinctive strain of being constantly on guard.

Westerman was glad enough that no ex-crook was told off to follow him about like a dog waiting for a call; though it was quite beyond his reasoning to understand the social distinction between himself and the professor. The social position was very succinctly voiced in the club that evening.

"Looks like a whole man, by Jove, and all that sort of thing, don't you know. But he's some sort of trader-fellow. Got that nest concession over on the East Cliffs."

It is doubtful whether Westerman could have understood the full significance of his condemnation if he had heard it. How could an American understand that the taking-up of a perfectly respectable concession should render him ineligible to consort with the members of an Anglo-Indian Club? He was sore and humiliated. He strode disgruntled along the beautifully kept rustic paths, exploring the island and immersed in thought—though more about his immediate problems than about the aloofness of the heaven-born.

Here he was in the islands at last. But how to get in touch with the man Rais Dost? To the prison authorities he could not disclose his interest in an obscure prisoner. Out of some eighteen thousand convicts how was he to locate his man? And, having located him, how was he to gain possession of the dagger, which would surely be hidden with the ultimate acme of Oriental cunning?

Thus he strode, moodily introspective, up one steep path and down another, and so to the far end of the island nearest the eastern horn of the horseshoe. And then all at once forgetfulness came to him and peace.

At the extreme point of the island, thrusting out toward the opposing horn of the main island of South Andaman, was a mass of ruined masonry. Westerman's practised eye knew it at once for an abutment where an unsuccessful attempt at building a bridge had been abandoned.

Coincident with the sight, gloom vanished from his face and worry from his mind. His eyes narrowed to slits, and he began to whistle thin disharmonies through his teeth as he stepped out on to the sagging concrete to examine the low cliff of the shore; and from there back again to the cliff to frown with head on one side at the intervening channel.

"Hm-mm-mm," he talked meditatively to himself. "Now I wouldn't have tried to— I would have thrown a suspension from the cliff and— Gee, I wish I could get a look at the soundings! That discoloration looks like a shelf, almost awash—'bout eight hundred feet, I'd guess. A couple of caissons, and then— By cripes, I'd like to have a shot at that."

And so he sat and dreamed dreams of bridges with an eighty-foot roadway and railroad tracks and a trolley connecting the score or so of luxurious officials on Ross Island with the main settlement. Till a great bell boomed, and immediately, though it was still quite light, lanterns began to flicker busily across the channel and up and down the paths behind him. For ever since the tragic occasion when the Earl of Mayo was murdered by a nihilistically inclined Mohammedan convict every man who wore an iron ring around his neck, and who had license to be abroad, was compelled to carry a lighted lantern after the bell sounded.

The morrow brought action. It was necessary to go to the East Cliffs and look over the concession; for the subterfuge of being a collector of edible birds'-nests must be kept up. A most efficient service of fast steam launches left the model dock at intervals of half an hour or so for all points on the settlement. Run entirely by ringed men with here and there a ten-year man in charge, the smooth working of the service was much to be commended.

The system on which the whole settlement is conducted is quite in the lead of modern penology. The consistent aim is to turn the life-sentence and few long-sentence convicts who alone are sent there, into honest, self-respecting citizens by the application of something resembling the Honor System.

For the first year or two, according to the individual's behavior, he is kept in the prison, laboring at a trade, for which payment accumulates to his credit. After that, up to a term of ten years, the man is turned out to labor at various settlement works without supervision—or rather not under guard—identified by an iron ring with a number stamped on it welded round his neck, and required, if not in domestic service, to report in at certain designated stations or barracks at night.

After ten years he is given a ticket of leave and becomes self-supporting. He may live wherever he pleases in one of thirty-six villages within the confines of the settlement. He may farm; or he may invest his accumulated earnings in a store, or a little business of some sort; and he may import his family and set up housekeeping. After twenty-five years of approved conduct he is given his freedom and may return to his own country. But quite a large percentage decide to remain in the settlement, tied to the businesses they have built up for themselves.

Except for the prisons there are no guards or walls or outposts. The settlement forbids the possession of weapons; and that is the only precaution though there is a certain grim irony about this. Where could a convict escape to? On three sides of the settlement is the sea, swarming with sharks and with the nearest coast one hundred and twenty-two miles away. The difficulty of building and secreting a boat, to say nothing of the necessary knowledge of navigation, reduces that possibility almost to nil; though three cases of escape during a history of one hundred and thirty years are on record.

On the fourth side, to the north, stretches away the jungle. Fifty miles to the extreme tip of South Andaman. Then the narrow Homfray Strait between South and Middle Andaman. Sixty more miles of jungle to Austin Strait. Then North Andaman, fifty miles again.

Safe asylum for a thousand escaped convicts, one would think. But—and this is a very big but indeed—in the jungles live the little black pigmies! Preferable a thousand times the sea and the sharks.

Ebony-skinned, kinky-haired, negroid, they belong by every right of association in Central Africa. Here, surrounded by Aryan and Mongolian and Malay peoples on the main lands to the west and east and south, they constitute an ethnographic freak. Marco Polo described them as dog-faced anthropophagi who ate men alive. While this statement is probably as much of a lie as most of Marco Polo's statements, later shipping history records a long list without a single exception of slaughtered landing-parties.

Implacable, savage as their own fierce little indigenous wild boar and not very much higher in the scale of evolution—they are unable even to build huts for themselves—they constitute a permanent unpaid patrol along the fringe of the colony that causes the most desperate convict to think very deeply indeed.

Now and then at rare intervals a few, driven mad by brooding, have made the attempt. Search parties have found the bodies of some of them within a hundred yards of the jungle edge, bloated and green, with a thin sliver of bamboo buried up to its tree-cotton tuft in some part of their anatomy. Others have got farther away, deeper than the search parties cared to go—but there is no record of their ever having showed up in their own home town again.

Years ago, before the Penal Administration learned wisdom, a punitive "mission" with rifles and a Gatling gun was sent into the jungle to inculcate into the savage mind a proper appreciation of the majesty of the Government. The half who returned reported that they had seen one savage. But they brought some very interesting blow guns and some bows and arrows of a queer shape out with them as the spoils of war.

After that the Government adopted the policy of establishing an out-station at the fringe of things where they left tobacco and beads and other presents with the gratifying result that some thirty of the savages have now become tame enough to come out of their runways in the dense jungles and accept the presents.

Which is after all a very small price to pay for a patrol which efficiently restrains eighteen thousand life-term convicts.

* * *

WESTERMAN was duly grateful to the patrol. For without them there could be none of that freedom to wander unrestrained which is accorded to the convict; and without that freedom there could be no intercourse and cautious inquiry about a man who owned a queer-looking dagger.

But cautious inquiry brought forth no very thrilling results. Rais Dost? The vast majority of the men who worked about the place with rings round their necks frankly knew nothing. Others, and quite a few at that, Westerman kept getting the current impression, retired instantly behind the dull blankness of assumed stupidity.

Prowling in places where no gentleman eligible for membership in the club ought to have any interest unless his duty dragged him thither, Westerman came in contact with the chief commissioner, who stood waiting as if he expected the trader person to tip his hat to him and say—

"Fine morning, sir."

Instead Westerman grinned at him.

"It's an inspiring sight," he remarked genially; though one who knew him well, the Gurkha for instance, would have detected that there was malice behind the cold eyes.

That aloof politeness of reception a few days ago and the formal courtesy of such other officials as he had dealt with in connection with his concession rankled in his soul. Westerman did not want courtesy; he wanted to be called "old top" and "you bally old ruffian."

The chief commissioner overlooked the matter of the hat.

"Oh, inspiring, you think? Why, if I may ask, Mr. Westerman?"

Now the British official in the East does not mister his equals. On the other hand he calls only his groom and his butler by his first name. Mister is reserved for beings apart, either very far above, where formality is a necessity, or a little way below, where meniality may not be expressed; as for instance, the tailor or the owner of a chain of million-dollar stores.

Westerman's eyes hardened.

"Why inspiring? All the busy little convicts working away, and your finger on the push-button. You say, 'Come,' and he cometh; 'Go,' and he goeth. Isn't that sense of authority thrilling? 'Lord of ten thousand lifers.' Gosh, what a movie title!"

If the chief commissioner had not been such a very high official he would have wondered whether Westerman was laughing at him. As it was, the thought of course was preposterous. But he didn't like the easy familiarity of this man who engaged in an occupation fit for a Chinaman. He performed the motion which indicated to his subordinates that the interview was ended;

but this obtuse American remained smilingly inviting further pleasantries. It was the chief commissioner who moved off with a brief and a very courteous, "Good day." He most decidedly did not like this confiding appearing person who had no sense of the fitness of things.

Westerman grinned—and this time the cold hardness had gone from his eyes. His reflection was:

"Hm! There's one perfectly good avenue of information ruined."

It was becoming clearer to him every day that he must think up some method of approach other than that which he had been pursuing. The native is suspicious by heredity of any white man who appears anxious to find out anything about another native. Before giving the information, even if innocent of all guile, he wants to know why the white man wants to know.

Bir Jung was unable to help in this juncture. Recognized by many of the prisoners as an ex-soldier of the guard, he was an object of suspicious resentment by all of them.

Together the two would sneak out where they could discuss matters without exciting suspicions by any undue familiarity between master and servant. Westerman always led the way to the point with the ruined masonry. Like the heartsick lover to the decayed slipper of the beautiful creature whom he might have married, he was drawn to the moldering atmosphere of the bridge that might have been.

And while the Gurkha cursed all secretive dogs of Delhi to the third and fourth generation in both directions, he would sit and smile out over the landscape through slits of eyes and drown his worries in calculations to the *n*th degree of the cosine of a million tons of steel.

It was the useless third of the combination, the professor, who again supplied the key to the next move. As a compatriot of Westerman's it was understandable that he should want to talk to him without arousing suspicion of their illicit connection and without endangering his standing in the club—provided of course that he did not overdo the thing.

"My whole journey has been wasted," he complained angrily. "Here I've come all this way for the sole purpose of getting permission from this Rais Dost person to buy that wonderful specimen. And now I find the man is dead.

"There is my whole trip wasted. There's nothing to compensate me here. Nothing old in these wretched islands. Time positively thrown away. Might as well never have come."

Westerman had apparently been laboring under the delusion that the professor had come on the journey for the purpose of acquiring a one-third interest in the hidden treasure. But all he said was:

"Dead? Phe-ew, that's a nasty jar. I was beginning to think the trail was kinder thin as it was; but this puts the— But how in thunder did you find out? I've been trying to get a line on that bird for days."

The professor snorted his scorn.

"Find out? Simple. I told the chief commissioner. Told him what I'd come for; and he had the man looked up in the prison books. Any fool could have thought of that."

It was simple. So many things are simple when one hobnobs with the great ones of the earth. Westerman made no defensive comment. His methodical mind framed the more important question—

"When did he die?"

"Ah, psha-ah! How should I know when he died? What difference does that make? Enough that he died. Murdered, by the way, by some unknown person. They never found out. And what does it matter to me which convict kills another or why?"

But to Westerman the fact that Rais Dost had been murdered mattered a great deal. Just why, mattered a great deal more. Here was where Bir Jung's shrewd knowledge of the Oriental mind was needed.

The ruined bridge was Westerman's inspirational place of conference. He sat with his back against the cliff, from which he could see the task which somebody else had failed to accomplish. It was stimulating to thought to feel that he, could he have had the opportunity, would not have failed. Through the dusk he saw visions of the bridge that might have been.

Bir Jung squatted, a rugged outline, at the extreme edge of a perilous concrete block from which he could spit comfortably into the sea, and listened with grave attention. His eyes burned with the hunting lust of a leopard which has just picked up the trail anew. Yet his tone was full of humility.

"Thus am I rebuked," he said. "But yesterday I had it in mind to give them a black he-goat, but through procrastination failed. Yet is their continued favor made manifest.

"Look; thus reads the tale, *sahib*. In Calcutta it was plotted that we should come to this place. Why?"

Westerman's mind followed him with logical directness.

"In order that we should bring with us the two daggers," he replied without hesitation.

"Thus it is in my mind too. Why then was it desirable to certain ones that we should bring the daggers here?"

"Because there's quite a bunch of the gang in this place," Westerman answered again. "I've spoken with them, and they've immediately shut up like clams."

"The *sahib's* eyes have missed nothing. The little fire that that *yogi* spoke of was clearly the beginning of a very big fire. That cleaning-up in the days of Smith *sahib*, ho-ho, it must have cleared the Delhi bazaars of half its *budmashes*. Now, *sahib*, why would one of the Three, a leader and a holder of a dagger, be slain?"

The train of Oriental intrigue was becoming a little too tortuous for Westerman. But the gloom of that silent spot and the dark shape of the Gurkha bulking tense and toad-like against the shimmer of the still bay, and the lanterns that walked up and down on the farther shore behind him, reminders of men with evil faces and iron rings round their necks, attuned his mind to any depth of treachery. He hazarded a theory.

"One of his own gang wanted the dagger?"

"*Shabash!* Good, *sahib*. But who? Tell me now, *sahib*. Who would have done that thing? For that is the man we must seek."

Westerman was silent.

"Hah! Listen then, *sahib*, and I will tell. The man who was clever enough to make a talk saying:

" 'Lo, I place my own wealth in the common fund. Let other patriots now do likewise.' "

"The man who, having by this means lured much treasure into the trap, persuaded his associates that security lay in three separate keys, each to be in the hands of a trusted keeper of whom he himself should be one—which key I later took from him, as the *sahib* knows. The same man who thereafter let fall a beam upon the keeper of the second key—which however he failed to find, since a swift turn of Fate placed it in the hands of the doctor *sahib*, whom he also slew in his ruthless quest. The man who, having thus lost two of the keys, for which he had slain two men, by the same simple expedient gained possession of the third key; and, having gained possession, made plans, despite his confinement in this island, which reached as far as U. S. Am'rika to lure back the first and the second keys.

"Such a man, *sahib*, is as clever as a she cobra who watches her eggs. Clever enough—" he leaned forward in the gloom, and his voice was ominously suggestive—"clever enough perhaps to know that the *sahib* now carries the twin keys in the hollow below his arm close to the heart."

But Westerman's first thought was one of revulsion for the cold treachery of the thing.

"Why, the filthy crook!"

He spat as he had learned from Bir Jung to express the extremity of disgust.

"Bumped off both his partners, with whom he must have made the most sacred oaths that his religion knew, in order to grab the whole of the loot!"

"Even so, *sahib*. The oath of the salt and the knife and the fresh earth must they have made. Yet what may one expect from a man of no caste? In my country is a saying—

" 'A dog's litter is also without honor.'

"What matter? The trail has thus become a clear road again; for I know the man, and he may now easily be found. Yet it behooves the *sahib* to walk warily as a tiger round a trap; lest a third dagger find sudden place close under his heart."

Westerman's only reply was a grunt out of the black shadows.

CHAPTER XII

CLEVER AS A SHE COBRA

THE line of inquiry had opened up very considerably. Westerman still met solemn faces which became suddenly doggedly blank. But there were others, native subordinates, whose memory a silver rupee helped amazingly. Yet somehow, somewhere along the line, something must have leaked in spite of Westerman's cautious procedure and story to the effect that the man Khoda Bux was a relative of his faithful old servant Karrim Bux, from whom he brought a letter.

Westerman found himself constantly being come upon by white officials, heads of various departments, just as he was about to glean some priceless piece of information. He ran foul of the chief commissioner again—who seemed to be a very efficient chief indeed and to have his finger very closely on the push-button.

The chief commissioner almost failed to be courteous. He hinted rather pointedly that Westerman seemed to be devoting very little of his time to his concession. Westerman's confident grin jarred horribly upon the great man's aristocratic soul.

"Ah, that's efficiency," Westerman explained airily. "Business organization. Yuen Li Chang is in charge, and he works his own coolies according to my method. He steals a good half, of course, but at that I am getting four baskets of first-grade clear and nine of second grades a day. About three hundred nests a day altogether; and that's twice as much as you got when the cliffs were worked officially."

Somehow there was a sting in everything that this unpleasantly confident person said. Further discussion might have developed into the retort discourteous. The chief commissioner moved away with the dignity of a lion leaving the field to a very determined-looking hound.

Such a strange relationship could not last. Fortunately it was not compelled to last. Bir Jung came to Westerman like some mountain idol that had escaped from its pedestal.

"The gods have delivered the man into our hands," he reported happily. "Khoda Bux has contrived to have himself assigned as a keeper of accounts to one Bhagwan Dass, a ten-year man who maintains a shop importing cloths and shoes and umbrellas and selling local fruits and grains to the populace. In village No. 28 is the place."

"How far?" was all that Westerman wanted to know.

"Eleven miles, *sahib*."

"Let's go," said Westerman.

The shop of Bhagwan Dass was clearly the leading department store of the village. Bolts of cotton goods lay along one wall. Bright yellow shoes hung by their laces from a rack. Copper cooking-pots gleamed invitingly from the interior gloom.

Sacks of rice and *Dhal* and coriander and cardamom and all the other strange grains which Orientals eat stood under an awning to one side. A fruit-stall occupied the other. An aroma of all the spices of the East floated out as an appealing advertisement to passers-by.

Within on a velvet rug sat the proprietor, cross-legged, fat and prosperous and quite obviously very much the better off for his ten years of discipline.

Westerman stated his business bluntly. The proprietor salaamed without evincing the least surprize and called into the rear. In a moment, almost as if he had been awaiting the summons, the man called Khoda Bux appeared.

He was, in comfortable contrast to the time when the Gurkha had seen him last in the stone quarry, growing sleek in his present less strenuous occupation. His brown face was alert—a little bulgy about the eyes, a little loose about the lips, but distinctly clever. The expression of bold insolence was furtive, but ready to come to the surface.

Such are the artificial inhibitions of environment. Here, as a convict speaking to a free man, his attitude conveyed an intolerable impression of veiled insolence. Under other circumstances, as the *zemindar*, the petty prince of Goobari, the man's bearing would have passed almost as dignity. He scowled at the Gurkha, but said nothing.

Westerman had decided on a straight and square plan of procedure. He had an abiding faith in the belief that one received what one gave. If one played one's cards on the table one would meet with a like dealing.

"Where can we talk?" he demanded.

The man signed to the rear of the shop, as if he were the owner, not the fat merchant. Westerman and Bir Jung followed him into a room, dim, as are all rear rooms of the East, stifling for lack of ventilation and heavy with the odor of merchandise. There were cushions to sit on. The man applied a coal out of a copper brazier to the bowl of a *hookah* water-pipe and sat in silence, waiting.

Westerman folded himself awkwardly on a cushion cross-kneed. With deliberation he removed his great pith helmet, wiped his brow and lit his pipe while he marshaled his facts in his mind; and then he stated his proposition with simple and direct brevity.

"No use in beating around the bush, Khoda Bux. You know why we've come."

The man nodded without expression.

"Well then, listen. You know we have the two daggers, and we know you have the third."

The dark, rather close-set eyes gleamed for just a second as if he had not been quite sure of everything; but he admitted nothing. Westerman was satisfied. He did not wish to conduct a dialog. He wished to state his proposition as clearly and as succinctly as possible, and he did so.

"Now, Khoda Bux, you know that your game is up. Anyway if you don't you should. The Indian Government has pretty well rounded up your crowd. Most of you are here. All the most important ones; you know that. And you know that escape is impossible. The few who are left in India can do nothing without leaders, and less than nothing without the money.

"*You* know better than anybody else alive how tightly the money is tied up—that was a clever move of yours, and I hand it to you for it. And—now make no error about this—Sivaji himself could never get two of those keys out of us."

He paused to let the statement soak in. Leaning forward, as he was, with the light from a foolishly inadequate window slanting on the hard angles of his cheek and nose and jaw, an outline that some unskilled craftsman might have hewn out of hard wood with an ax, the sinews on his hands showing in square-cut relief against the white of his trouser knees, he forced a conviction of the ultimate, immovable fact.

A grunt from Bir Jung out of a dim corner completed the inexorable dictum. Khoda Bux remained an expressionless statue.

"Now are you willing to listen to what I have to offer?"

At last the statue moved just a little, and his eyes caught a reflection from the brazier which looked for a moment as if two of the coals had leaped to his head. He bowed in silence.

"Well then, my proposition is this."

Westerman spoke slowly, planting each word solidly down as the irrevocable finality.

"Give me your dagger and let me get the money—and I'll give you my word as a white man that I'll use as much of it as may be necessary to come back here somehow with a ship or an aeroplane or a blamed submarine and snake you out of this!"

Still no move. Westerman elaborated.

"You see, I am not a British subject; so I can't get all het up over a political prisoner —not for your political crimes, that is. I'll tell you right now I wouldn't move a step if there was any chance of your fool revolution coming off. But there's not a chance in a million. So I'm game to get you free and land you anywhere you like. And you can lay your last dime that I'll do it.

"And I tell you what," he added. "I'll give you a lump sum out of the loot to start business with all over again."

It was Bir Jung who broke the silence.

"Since the *sahib* has said so, it will surely so happen. *Wallah*, but that will be a game worth the playing!"

At last the statue spoke.

"Since I am impaled upon the spear of the *sirkar*, and since it is true that my followers are likewise held in the hollow of the *sirkar's* hand, and since I believe that the *sahib* speaks a true word, I accept. It is kismet. I had thought to wrestle with fate and to wrest my own desire from her. But my fate is too strong for me."

He bowed his head on his breast, a picture of a man born to ambition who sees his ambition crumbling to dust. So that Westerman for the moment almost forgot the foulness of his treachery and felt sorry for him. From the bowed head rumbled the final surrender.

"I will deliver the dagger, the third key, to the *sahib*, but it is not here; it is hidden in a safe place, a hut at the far confines of the settlement."

"Good!" said Westerman. "I am glad you can see the sensible side of it. And you can count on my keeping up my end. Somehow, someway, I—with the help of friend Bir Jung—will get you clear. That's final. Now when can we get that other dagger?"

Khoda Bux raised himself out of his dejection.

"Now," he said with sudden energy.

Westerman felt that Bir Jung was looking at him. He looked up in turn into those eyes which had so often held the same thought as his own, and presently he began to sense the thought behind them. It had to do with two daggers wrapped in soft leather snuggling close under his heart. In the semi-gloom he reached his long arm under his shirt to feel for their safety.

"Come, let's go," he said.

Khoda Bux evinced not the slightest sign of surprize at his readiness. He had clearly been expecting this visit and some such conference. Without a word he rose and led the way from the room. Passing through the shop, he paused and said to the fat merchant, his master—

"If inquiry should come during my absence see that thou makest proper excuse."

With that curt order he swung out into the street. Westerman paused long enough to buy some fruit aginst what promised to be a long and hot tramp. There was a goodly array of tropical thirst-quenchers. He selected some smaller things and looked longingly at some great luscious melons.

"Too darn big to pack along with us," he murmured. "But they look awful good."

The fat merchant was eager to make a sale.

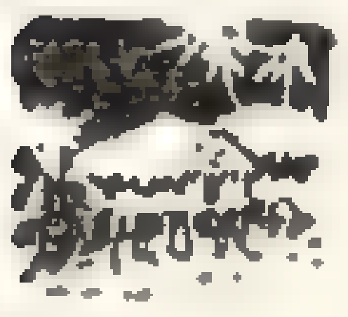
"Assuredly good, *sahib*," he recommended. "The best melons in the island. Such do not grow in the garden of the commissioner *sahib* himself."

"Hm-m, that's true," Westerman admitted. "Bet the professor would enjoy them. Say, suppose you send a couple."

"Assuredly, *sahib*," said the merchant, and he beckoned a coolie with a basket. Westerman with meticulous care selected a couple of the ripest and packed them into the man's basket. "Professor Imray Sahib. Commissioner Sahib's house. Can you remember that?"

"*Ji han*," said the coolie.

"Very well then, beat it. The merchant will pay you four annas when you come back. How much for the fruit; *dokandar*? A rupee? You're a robber, but let it go. Come on, Bir Jung. Friend Khoda Bux is hopping on his toes with impatience to get away."



THE way led through the village and up along the east shore. At intervals men came out of the fields and looked at them inquisitively. But Khoda Bux made no sign, and they immediately dropped their eyes and feigned disinterest.

There was no need of concealment. The village was quite a distance from the busy portion of the settlement, and the road led ever farther away from it. White officials were few and far between; and native overseers would see nothing unusual in a ringed man accompanying a white man as a guide. There was every possibility that he might have been assigned to him for some such purpose.

The road left cultivation and skirted the beach. White sands; a thin fringe of it, for the tide was half out. At full-tide the sea washed the rocky walls as far up as the vegetation; and the vegetation, reaching out with fierce tropical vigor, seized and held valiantly on to every last little nook or cranny in the rocks as far down as the sea would let it. No shore-line; just sea and a brilliant gem of greenery rising out of it.

Thirty feet above, the road, a clean, orderly, perfectly graded Central Park path hewn out of the rock and maintained by lavish convict labor, winding in and out following the curve of coral bays, peeping between mossy trunks under palm fronds and orchids at sunlit water all yellow and green and pink with the reflections from the sands beneath. A fairy island where every prospect pleased and only man was vile.

Khoda Bux walked in front, silent and morose, as was easy to understand. All his life, all his ambitions, were crumbling before his eyes. Only once he half stopped and asked one vital question.

"The *sahib* will swear that he will come back?"

Westerman came out of his own introspection, and his eyes lit up at some distant thought.

"Don't worry," he said quickly. "We shall come. For the sheer fun of the thing if for nothing else."

And Bir Jung behind him grunted—

"*Shabash.*"

The trim road began to be less trim. An occasional boulder, fallen from above, lay in the path. They were coming to the end of things. The wild life of the island began to be more apparent. To a naturalist the peculiar indigenous forms would have been absorbingly interesting. The red-cheeked parrakeet hung impudently from the low branches before the very faces of the silently plodding men. The queen Andaman *bulbul*, unlike any of its species anywhere else in all Asia, gurgled its song till they were almost upon it, and then whirred off flashing its yellow danger signal and scolding with all the shrewishness of *bulbuls* all over Asia. The yellow-eared *minah* talked humanly from above and dropped squashy fruits and laughed sepulchrally at the feat.

They were now farther toward the untamed jungle than the road gangs cared to go without being driven; and since cultivation had ceased miles ago, farther than overseers cared to drive them. Nor was there any particular necessity for keeping up the road at that far border.

Yet presently a hut loomed through the trees. Rather a well-kept and commodious place for a hermit who lived by choice at the very fringe of the jungle. A long, low shed of sun-dried brick with a door and two glassless openings in view. It looked, judging by the length, as if there might be another window also hidden behind the banana-trees.

A place of two rooms at least; but apparently deserted. No chickens ran about; no dogs barked as they approached. Yet crows stalked before the door and pecked at garbage and peered suspiciously at huddled piles of rags and sacking.

There was nothing to be said against the place. It was a very typical slipshod Oriental dwelling. Yet there was so little that was definite about it that it conveyed the unpleasantly anonymous impression of a deserted house where people still lived.

Khoda Bux whistled shrilly through his teeth—unnecessarily shrilly—and muttered something about dogs sleeping when the master was away. At the sound one of the huddled heaps of sacking rose with a bound and stood apelike on its feet.

It was a human being of some sort; but a human being gone back to the dawning of things. The face was matted hair and beard and piercing, frightened eyes. There was nothing else to describe. The shapeless garment of burlap hid limbs which presumably existed.

The creature salaamed to the ground before Khoda Bux and remained in that position as if expecting a foot to be placed upon its neck.

"A servant," said Khoda Bux, "whom I keep to maintain the place," and added:

"The *sahib* knows already so much. Why should I lie to him? A few adherents remain from the old days. This is one whom the gods have afflicted and the *sirkar* permits to live in this place. Will the *sahib* enter?"

The *sahib* did, and Bir Jung followed, growling to himself—

"It may yet become necessary to show this up-country dog that I, too, am alive."

"Will the *sahib* condescend to avail himself of this poor accommodation and sit?"

Khoda Bux continued to address himself exclusively to Westerman. Since the first scowl of recognition he had entirely ignored Bir Jung's existence.

Westerman had to smile at this inappropriate demonstration of race intolerance. Here was Khoda Bux, a petty princeling of central India, the man of no caste and no principle, life-term convict, exhibiting—quite outside from their previous personal quarrel—an ingrained conscious superiority over the hillman, the savage, who owned no land. On the other hand the Gurkha, fiercely jealous of his honor, proud of his fighting ancestors, looking with scorn upon the plainsman whom his people had consistently raided for centuries before the British came along and put a stop to it.

Yet the petty princeling's manner, now that he so desired, was perfection. He displayed the dignified courtesy of a man who had known authority.

"The *sahib* will permit that my servant enter his presence? The dagger is in his hiding, he being faithful to me alone."

Clever as a she cobra. Not a precaution had this man overlooked. Treacherous to the lowest depth of slime himself, he took care that not the most trusty of his coplotters should be tempted to murder him in the hope of finding the dagger on his person.

He whistled shrilly again, and the half-witted creature entered, doubled up in obeisance. Khoda Bux growled an order to him. Instance of the petty soul to which the display of authority is as meat and drink. What a hate there must have burned in his heart against the *sirkar* that had brought him to degradation! The servant salaamed yet lower and slunk from the room.

Westerman found time to look about him. The room was long, as had been surmised from the outside. Two of the window-frames opened into it. A bench of split bamboo was built in along each wall. At the end opposite the door was a raised platform or dais on which stood the only piece of furniture in the room. A crudely carved over-ornate chair. Almost a lodge-room of some Venerable Order of Associated Democratic Red Men. At one side of the dais a door led into an inner chamber of mysteries.

The creature returned, almost crawling, and placed a package of earth-stained banana-leaves in his lord's hands. Westerman felt himself tingling all over. Khoda Bux tore off the leaf wrapping and disclosed another of dirty rag. Nonchalantly he unrolled this, and immediately a soft glow lit the palm of his hand. Bir Jung was standing crouched, tense, like a leopard. His eyes rivaled the glittering thing.

"The Eight-Handed Siva!" he breathed. "The last of the keys!"

Khoda Bux made a motion as if to give the thing to Westerman; and then he held back his hand and asked a momentous question.

"Before I relinquish all that is left to me, let the *sahib* tell me. When he has released me from this island of devils where may I go where the hand of the British *sirkar* can not fall upon me?"

"Where? Well, there's half the countries of the earth. Goshallmighty, they don't own all of it!"

"True, *sahib*. Yet, speaking no language but a little English, where may I, as the *sahib* says, start business anew? What of the *sahib's* own country?"

"United States? Well, we don't deport *political* refugees. But we don't want crooks; though God knows we get enough of them from all the jails in Europe."

Even at this juncture he had to be blunt:

"But you'll find a raft of your own people over there. They come to study in our colleges, and they are all sons of kings. You'd probably meet some of your own crowd there, and you could get together and hatch sedition in the curry-shop."

"*Sahib*," Bir Jung warned suddenly, "the dog is but talking to gain time. Let us be swift and wary."

And at the same moment the rush came.

FROM door and windows lithe, barefooted men leaped into the room and closed upon them. Westerman barely had time to smash a fist into the face of the first and again into the midriff of another, before he was swamped. There must have been some fifteen or twenty of them; mostly with rings, but some free men, new adherents to the plot which must have been developing underground like a fungus mycelium ever since the master mind had been remitted to the island from his former sphere of activity.

Now ten to one was no very conclusive argument with Westerman. He had been in quite strenuous brawls before. But his ally unfortunately was not able to contribute his proper share.

The Anglo-Saxon is the only race that has developed the art of fighting without weapons. The Gurkha, with his wicked kookerie knife in his hand, was deadly, and would have waded joyfully into a mess of limbs and bowels. Taken as he was, he could do no more than hug an assailant in each powerful arm and wrestle with them. The science of fist and foot and knee was outside of his ken.

Westerman broke all the rules of civilized warfare in the first two minutes, and stamped and lurched up and down and across the room, the nucleus of a clawing mass of men from which issued a scream now and then as a finger-bone broke or an elbow was dislocated. But the thing could not last. Sheer weight and mass dragged him down.

The master mind retired to the platform out of the way of the battle and directed things. In a very few minutes Westerman and the Gurkha were dragged before him swathed with cords and propped up on their feet.

Khoda Bux's smile was replete with triumph, full-lipped and very eager. His eyes, which had so carefully dissembled hitherto, were now the exact counterpart of the she cobra's. He drank in the pleasing sight with an audible gloating, and the suavity of his voice had given place to a snarl like the swish of a sword—just as he must have spoken in the old days when the tenants, whom he loved to call his subjects, cringed before him.

"Fool!" he jeered. "Heavy-brained *sahib* who dared to plot against me—*me*, who plotted against all the *sahibs* of all India at once. Who stood at the threshold of success against all the *sirkar* when the wheel of fate turned!"

He drew himself up and struck his chest so that the iron ring around his neck rattled incongruously.

"Who stand now once again, in possession of the keys that are mine, ready to seize the wheel on its upward side and rise with it! Rise to the pinnacle—" he was declaiming now with grandiloquent gesture—"the pinnacle of power, of freedom, of majesty over all Hind——"

He seemed to realize that he was losing himself in rhetoric. He controlled himself with a long breath and turned his attention for the first time to the Gurkha. For the native there was native abuse. The evilly exultant face changed to cruel vengefulness.

"Dog already dead!" he gritted at Bir Jung through his teeth. "Once didst thou lay thy cow-butcher's hand upon me. Misconception of a mountain buffalo, thus do I repay, and thus."

From his height on the platform he kicked Bir Jung with his naked foot on the mouth, than which there is but one greater insult.

From the *thakur* of Bhatgaon under this deadly affront came the inarticulate growl of a bear, and he hurled himself forward with bared gums to rend the man with his teeth. Hopeless effort of course. A dozen hands snatched at him and held him while their chief, letting his rage run riot in an orgy of fury, beat with hands and elbows upon his face.

After the first wild outburst of fury Bir Jung stood up to the blows without a flinch. When it was all over he spat to one side with slow deliberation.

"Fear not, the *sirkar* will never hang thee," he said quietly.

"Fool!" the chief shouted. "Thou art dead already."

He turned from profitless abuse to his followers, and the haughty leer began to come over his face again in anticipation of a more pleasurable occupation.

"Search the *sahib*," he ordered, "and take from his person the two daggers which he carries always with him."

It was Westerman's turn to smile; to laugh at some huge jest which he was able to discern in the proceedings. The chief scowled angrily at him till his merriment lessened and he saw fit to speak.

"Mighty prince among plotters!" said Westerman. "Clever little monkey conspirator who pitted your vast brain against all the intellectuals of the Indian Government! Listen to this, y' poor goat. I shed those daggers under your very eyes. Shoved 'em into——"

Caution tempered his triumph. He checked his betrayal abruptly and shrugged with as much cool insult as his bonds would let him.

"Anyway," he continued with vast relish, "I haven't got 'em now. So just you sit up and watch me grin."

CHAPTER XIII

JUDGMENT OF DEATH

FOR a horrible half-minute after this announcement the chief stood like a devil carved out of stone. Then with a hoarse scream he whirled up the glimmering dagger of Siva the Destroyer and leaped upon Westerman to complete the sacrifice then and there.

There was a clamor of frightened outcries from his followers, and a babble of confusion. Those who held Westerman jerked him out of reach so that he fell to the ground, while others rushed forward to restrain the maniac and babbled scared remonstrance and advice at him from all sides:

"Nay, great chief, this we dare not."

"Let reason prevail, O Khoda Bux. This is a madness."

"Among so few *sahibs* how can one disappear without a mighty upheaval?"

"How indeed, brothers? All would be ruined."

It was true. In that well-regulated and thoroughly registered community even an obscure convict could not die without proper explanation forthcoming. How much less a white man! There was not a remote chance of a disappearance being written off as *spurlos versenkt.*

In the case of a white man there would be a combing of the island which would inevitably lay bare many surprizing matters; and investigation was the last thing that the plotters wanted. Khoda Bux was convinced, yet murderously determined.

"They can not now be let go," he insisted with deadly truth. "What then must be done with them?"

"Let there be *panchayat,*" was the clamor.

"Good! Let there be counsel."

Khoda Bux agreed with a distinct show of alacrity rather surprizing in a man whose whole impulse was personal power. Yet there was a reason for his readiness to agree to a general discussion—a queer insight into the petty vanity which so often dictates the actions of otherwise clever men.

He retired into the room at the rear, from which commenced to issue sounds of boxes being opened and rustlings in the thatched roof. The men in the room seated themselves in two rows on the bamboo benches in expectation. Two went out to act as lookouts. Six of them guarded the bound prisoners at the far end of the room. The stage was set for a ceremony.

The master returned, pompous as a chairman of the Independent Order of Somethingorother at an initiation. He was dressed in the full panoply of a ruling chief of India. The material was cheap and tawdry and creased, a hired fancy-ball costume; but the style was there. Gold brocaded *chapkan,* tight white trousers, upturned embroidered shoes, near-silk turban with a shiny ornament in front, and— consummate masterpiece—a genuine jeweled sword.

How the thing had been smuggled into the island was a mystery. Some bale of merchandise or sack of grain must have concealed it. A vast amount of trouble and intrigue and careful plotting must have been devoted to the procuring of this crowning vanity.

But there it was. Genuine enough. Fluted hilt and embossed sheath and engraved curved blade. The raja's badge of authority.

The men in the room salaamed like automatons at the apparition. The grandiose figure stepped on to the platform and seated himself in the chair. Its meaning was clear now; it was a throne. He laid the sword across his knees in the prescribed manner and announced with grave majesty—

"The *durbar* is open."

Immediately arose a babble of voices, everybody suggesting, advancing his own plan, arguing loudly with his neighbors who disagreed with him, small difference being paid to the pretentious figure on the throne. These men, while they had been drilled by the dominant mind to pander to his passion for authority, could not be convinced in their hearts of the divine right of a king who wore an iron collar welded round his neck.

It was the old psychology of the pirate crew. The leader was no other than one of themselves, and he remained a leader by virtue of his superior cunning, and for just as long as he could dominate the rest.

The whole thing was so incongruous—this extraordinary egoist unable to refrain from playing at majesty in a deadly crisis; and these miserable convicts pretending to sit in serious judgment—that Westerman laughed out loud. He knew now where to hurt the man most; and he felt very much like hurting him. Just then he laughed therefore with elaborate ostentation.

The princeling gritted his teeth but was helpless. He did, however, rattle his sword and succeed in establishing some semblance of order.

"He who has a plan, let him speak it," he snarled.

Immediately a dozen plans were shouted forth; and Westerman laughed again. Thus an hour passed, the scouts coming in from time to time to report that that outlying, deserted spot remained comfortably deserted.

Yet the upshot of it all resulted in a plan. When twenty criminal minds direct their thoughts on a single object something peculiarly vicious is bound to be evolved. It condensed down to this.

"Let them be taken up the coast, far enough that they can not escape, and let them there be left. If they attempt to return by way of the shore the Aryauto, the fish-eaters, will shoot them full of turtle arrows within three hundred paces; if by way of the jungle, the Eremtaga, the forest-dwellers, within a hundred will blow the little darts dipped in the *mukuaku.* In two days we shall return and bring back their corpses, swollen and green, and shall say:

" 'Lo, they strayed but a hand's breath into the jungle and the little devil people slew them. Yet at great risk we recovered the bodies.' Thus also may a reward accrue to us."

It was clever, as it was bound to be. Typical of the subtle Oriental mind. There was no disagreement. The plan was too perfect in every way. The men with the dangerous knowledge would be safely disposed of, and the plotters would be rewarded for bringing them in.

Once arrived at the decision, no time was lost. Night was coming, and night was most favorable for the execution of the plan. Bamboo poles were quickly brought and thrust between the bound wrists and ankles of the prisoners. They were lifted like dead game on to the shoulders of four men apiece, and the party set out at a quick trot into the belt of trees.

The jungle here was quite evidently not nearly so deadly as the general opinion of the settlement believed. The bearers knew very clearly where they were going. Certain trees evidently served as well recognized channel buoys in a twisted and intricate path where there was no sign of a trail.

Half an hour's journey brought them to a creek as twisted and jungle-grown as the path. The prisoners were thrown on the ground, and swift preparations went forward.

Westerman, rolling over, was able to see everything; and even in his present apparently hopeless predicament he was forced to admit certain admiration for the man who had planned so craftily in such difficult circumstances.

In the creek was a boat of the very able type that the fishermen of the Pondicherry Coast use, by no means ill-constructed. It was equipped with a sail, laboriously sewed together of sack burlap, and with long oars. It was quite clear that a careful plan of escape had been nursed along with a secrecy such as only Orientals are capable of, keeping pace with the careful plan of regaining possession of the two daggers which had never been lost sight of.

Communication with sympathizers on the main land must have been inconceivably difficult to carry on without detection under the watchful scrutiny of the settlement officials, though the most careful watchfulness by white men could hardly hope to cope with the craft of Orientals who were officially permitted to import bales of a wide assortment of goods from the mother country.

At all events plans had been laid and had progressed and had not been discovered. They were now completed apparently to the last details and needed only the two daggers for their triumphant culmination. Westerman was able to understand better now the master mind's murderous rage.

Within a space of time which gave proof of practise everything was ready. Most of the ringed men had to report in at their barracks at night. A few had been intrigued into assignments like those of their leaders. These with the ten-year men formed the crew. The prisoners were thrown into the bottom of the boat, and the captors immediately began to pole it silently toward the mouth of the creek.

A fringe of branches hid the entrance, a typical pirate's lair. One of the crew waded ashore and crept to the jungle edge to keep watch seaward until it should be dark enough to venture out.

All night the boat traveled, at first propelled by oars, and later, when a cool breeze sprang up, under sail it rolled clumsily; even quartering waves slapped over the lower weather gunwale, proof that the amateur builders had somewhere missed the lines of the Pondicherry fisher craft. The prisoners soon lay in a pool which sloshed over their faces as the boat rolled. But since the water was warm and the boat was new that was no very great hardship considered against the fact that they were presently to be put ashore with the confident promise of being shot full of poisoned darts from blow-guns within three hundred paces. Yet in spite of that awesome prospect Westerman found himself reflecting with a spirit of thankfulness on what foul slime he would be lying in had the boat been an old and well-seasoned Pondicherry fisherman.

Nobody took any notice of them, and nobody baled. They were all too busily occupied in handling their unaccustomed boat. Yet the thing was really a miracle of guesswork and patience, considering the fact that none of these men were boat-builders; that they had the most meager of broken tools discarded by various settlement works; that the timbers were stolen one by one and the nails filched in tiny handfuls from the prison workshop. Is it the incarnate spirit of freedom that develops in prisoners otherwise worthless that splendid quality of resourcefulness and patience?

Night wore on, and still they rowed and sailed in spasms. Sleep was impossible. Lying in tepid water among the feet of convicts thinking of the near prospect was racking to the nerves.

Westerman knew that he would require all his faculties to be at their highest possible pitch if he would entertain any hope of extricating himself from the situation. He beguiled himself and diverted his thoughts by talking aloud to Bir Jung in insulting tones about the play-acting would-be leader of men. "Monkey princeling," and "king of a convict court" and "dealer in childish plots" were terms that rolled unctuously round his tongue.

The Gurkha was not responsive. He was in a dark mood. The affront which had been heaped to overflowing upon his honor gnawed at his fierce soul. His replies were few, through set teeth, but much to the point.

"Let the offal be, *sahib*. The manner of his death is prescribed." Again—

"Within the week will I festoon his bowels among the tree tops to make sport for his ancestors."

Khoda Bux endured for a while in silence. But a low laugh out of the dark from one of his followers goaded him raging to the retort discourteous.

From his position at the tiller he had tried to kick down into the dark puddle of feet and floating chips in the hope of finding a face. But he succeeded only in hurting himself. His rage was forced to content himself with speech, thickly, through champing teeth.

"Dead men," he grated. "Within the hour of daylight will your corpses be swelling beneath the flies."

Westerman laughed in loud scorn. But it must be admitted that the weight of the argument lay with the convict.

The fatal hour of daylight began to creep at last in a glory of pale pink out of the eastern sea. They had come far enough, and it was time to put the victims ashore before the little savages, who were afraid of the dark, should be waiting to ambush the boat as it came in.

Khoda Bux gave a surly order, and the boat shot onto a sandy beach. The ceremony of parting was as rancorous as it was swift. The prisoners were thrown ashore in a hurry. Their captors were very much afraid.

"Let them unbind themselves," was the unanimous opinion.

Khoda Bux paused only to spit in Bir Jung's face and to enjoy his final triumph over Westerman. Khoda Bux gloated a brief while over his helplessness and then told him his crowning triumph.

"Listen, *sahib* who thought yourself clever enough to plot against me. Tomorrow we return for your bodies. Yet think on this to sweeten the few minutes that are left to you of your life: Three of the servants of the commissioner *sahib's* house are my men!"

With which cryptic utterance he climbed over the prow of the boat, and the men pushed off hurriedly. In another minute they were out of sight round the bend of the little bay.

CHAPTER XIV

LITTLE BLACK DEVILS

WESTERMAN rolled over to Bir Jung, "Sooner we untie each other and get under cover the better," he guessed. "Let's hop to it before it gets light. Out here we're a mark for a blind man."

The untying was easy. So was the getting under cover. A short scramble up the steep bank and they were engulfed in tropical undergrowth where, as long as they stood still, nothing could find them.

"Guess we'd better hold a *durbar*," he said with a cheerfulness that was amazing in the circumstances. "Let there be council. To begin with, friend Bir Jung, it looks once more as though your gods have sure had the cards stacked on them this time."

Bir Jung was very close to the limit of his faith.

"We be indeed in bad case, *sahib*. Where we are is unknown to us. How far we are is yet a greater mystery. How many thousand devils inhabit these jungles is beyond the knowledge of man."

There spoke the mountaineer. In his own hill jungles, where distant peaks can be noted down for landmark, he could have found his way back from anywhere. Wide stretches of level ground disquieted him enough. But the sea to him was a cold mystery. His sense of direction in the boat had left him utterly; and he felt lost indeed.

But Westerman was able to furnish comfort, which accounted for his own undismayed outlook. It was not very much; but it certainly shed a more pleasing light on the apparent hopelessness on the situation.

"It's not as bad as all that, Bir Jung. To begin with, the *sirkar* has published a report in which it estimates the savages at about two thousand. Guesswork mostly; but even if we double it, gosh, what's it amount to? We might travel a month in these jungles without meeting up with any of them.

"To go on with, this island isn't any more than about fifty miles long; so we are not so frightfully far from home. And as to direction: If we keep going due south we can't miss the settlement."

The Gurkha's expression, commencing from the bottom pit of dejection, changed in three successive leaps with the three statments. The helpless uncertainty of things cleared up, he was Bir Jung of the fighting *thakur* caste once more.

"So?" he frowned in careful calculation. "In that case within the half of the week can I redeem my oath."

"Hm. Glad to see you that confident," said Westerman. "But I'm free to confess to you that without weapons the hole we're in looks pretty tight to me."

A grin began for the first time to chase the morose gloom from Bir Jung's face.

"That, *sahib*, is a matter in which this *sirkar* is much to blame. Being weaponless, a man of honor is—may the gods curse this knot!—is indeed not far removed—" he was tugging at the sodden draw-string of the baggy pajamas, tight from the knee down, that his people wear—"not very much better than a cultivator of—for this wetting will I slay three of his followers with him!—a digger of the soil. Yet— So! At last! An evil cord which I must replace."

He had bared his left side and thigh, and he took now from its snug lashing close against the bare skin his own venerated, wicked, beautiful kookerie knife.

Reverently he drew the broad boomerang blade and wiped it clear of salt water. He made a few dexterous passes and whirled it with a wrist motion for sheer joy of the feel of it.

"Lucky are we indeed, *sahib*, that that dog—whom I shall gut with this very blade—was too overcome by the *sahib's* disclosure that the daggers were no longer with him to order that I be searched. Now then the question remains: Do we slaughter the Aryauto, the shore-dwellers, or the Eremtaga of the inner jungle?"

"Oh, *shabash*, Bir Jung!" Westerman applauded him. "*Shabash* indeed! That was well thought of. As to how we'd better travel, there's no two ways about it. Along the shore would be better going; but it would add a hundred miles, and we'd be in full view. No, let's chance the Eremtaga. We're both jungle men; and if we're as carful as the —— and have half his luck we *may* get through without being jumped upon."

"Thus it is in my mind too," Bir Jung agreed. "Yet regarding the matter of weapons, *sahib*, it is mystery to me in what manner the *sahib* rid himself of the daggers twain which to my certain knowledge he carried below his heart."

Westerman was able, even in their present predicament, to grin in appreciation of his own artifice.

"Ho-ho, that was an easy trick," he explained gleefully. "What did you think I bought the fruit for? We didn't eat it. And the melons for the professor? Shucks, he hates the darn things.

"But while that cunning —— was hopping on his toes half-way down the road to get us started out to his trap I pawed over and fiddled with the biggest, and then, while the fat shopkeeper was calling up the coolie, I shoved the fancy stilettos well into a soft spot. Since there was no hilt guard they went in easily enough.

"Gee, I was scared stiff he'd become suspicious about the careful way I packed them into the coolie's basket with my own hands; but he was too grouchy to watch. The professor knows that I know he loathes melons, so he'll come out of his scientific dreams for long enough to open them up carefully somewhere in private. My only fear is that he'll forget immediately and leave them lying around in full view."

Bir Jung smote his thigh with a shout of approval—and then suddenly clapped his hand to his mouth in swift belated caution and looked round and listened. Then in more careful tones he gave his, "*Shabash!*" of admiration.

"Yet, *sahib*," he added with a troubled expression, "my heart misgives me. Cunning indeed is the man as many devils; and it comes to me that his wit has read the whole of what the *sahib* said but three words. Else why had he made the boast that three of the servants in the commissioner *sahib's* house were his own men?"

Westerman looked through the dense wall of greenery all round him with narrowed, far-seeing eyes. He nodded slightly and slowly to himself with lips hard set. Then he shrugged out of the dark introspection and brought his mind back to practical matters of immediate moment.

"Well," he said almost airily, "if he gets them we'll just have to rustle out and take them away again, that's all. And the faster we get through this jungle hike and go look-see, the better. So let's step."

Not more than fifty miles of jungle to

go, and some two thousand savages to avoid. A task not quite so hopeless as Khoda Bux and his crew had thought. Their attitude in the matter, as was that of all the prisoners in the settlement, was a fixation of the terror of uncertainty.

It was quite true, as more than one grisly tragedy had proved, that wandering bands of the pigmies came every now and then to the confines of the settlement and peered from their leafy screen with animal curiosity at the strange doings of the men folk in the clearings. Quite naturally, if anybody came near enough within blow-gun range, a silent dart out of nowhere bagged the big game. Quite naturally, too, the convicts were filled with a very wholesome terror and believed the mysterious savages to be some sort of half-devil, numberless and all pervading.

Yet it is probable that the Government estimate, laboriously arrived at, and after a long period of years, was fairly accurate. It was not impossible then for two men like Westerman and Bir Jung to avoid the crude encampments of the savages while making their way through the jungle. If indeed the term encampment could be applied to the flimsy temporary wind shelters which were their nearest approach to houses, behind which they lived till the stench of putrescent garbage festering in the heat drove them to another location.

Going was fairly easy. For this Andaman jungle, while tropical, is not the dense lush undergrowth of the Bornean or Brazilian rain forests. Most of it was like the growth of Bir Jung's own Himalayan Terai. There were occasional patches of bamboo scrub where one could walk upright; and for the rest, a pair of active men, with considerable climbing and crawling and going round, could make headway without having to use a machete. Which was a godsend, in fact their one hope of success; for there is no mistaking the sound of a machete chopping a way through the underbrush and liana tangles; and it is astonishing how far that thick, juicy sound will carry.

Half the day passed without misadventure. Cautious, watchful, slinking like silent animals on the trail, they had met nobody. The question of food became an urgent one; they had not eaten since the day before.

"*Kyê parwa*," said Bir Jung. "What is a fast of forty-eight hours to men such as we, who have fasted before? *Huth theri*, it is nothing."

"Sure, we can fast if we have to," Westerman admitted. "But food means strength; and we'll possibly be needing all the strength we have before we get through. So we'd better eat."

"True, *sahib*. Yet unless we might chance upon a pig—in which case within fifty paces I would surely, as would any true Gurkha, decapitate it with thrown kookerie—our bellies will just as surely shrink."

Westerman chuckled with all the joy of a conjurer who has a startling trick up his sleeve.

"Well, maybe I can pull a little stunt that I used to be able to not so long ago. Time was when I was a ball fan and quite something of a pitcher. Played the bush leagues. Seems to me I ought to be able to bean a bush turkey or a peacock or something."

Bir Jung was mystified.

"These words I do not know, *sahib*. What manner of labor is this that the *sahib* was employed in which enables him to come within reach of these great birds, which are many but shy?"

Westerman laughed.

"After lunch I'll explain baseball to you. For the present, you watch. What I need is rocks, a bagful of 'em; 'cause the pitching-arm will be quite some rusty."

Rocks were plenty. So were peafowl and pheasants and a wide variety of the larger *razores*. Westerman must have been a straight and a very fast pitcher in his playing days. His long-boned, powerful arm could hurl a heavy pebble almost as if shot from a sling. It was not long before an over-confident peahen was lifted three feet into the air off its perch and brought down—though it made a terrific racket before they could catch it and choke off its piercing, nasal squawks.

Fire was the next difficulty, Westerman pointed out. It was Bir Jung's turn to produce the trick from up his sleeve. On the inner side of his kookerie sheath he showed a supplementary leather pocket which contained the regulation hunter's equipment of short skinning-knife and flint and steel, and even a packet of tinder wrapped in banana-leaf. Westerman nodded his appreciation; but his calculating mind was thinking ahead on another tack.

"That's not what I meant. Smoke is bad medicine in flat country, friend Jung. We can get dry sticks enough so they'll be next to nothing to see; but the smell of burning will drift through still jungle for miles. We couldn't advertise ourselves better by banging on a drum.

"No, siree. We've just got to hold our belts in till we come to a current blowing out to sea, follow that to the cliff edge and build our fire there, where the air currents will dissipate the smoke the same as in your hills."

"The *sahib's* precaution is wise and puts me to great shame," admitted Bir Jung. "I had thought thoughtlessly, saying in my haste that the jungle devils, perchance scenting smoke, would pass it by as being the doings of others of their own tribe."

They ate, as they had traveled, on the constant *qui vive* but without mishap. Rest neither of them needed. The morning's travel had been hideously strenuous—that continuous ducking and climbing and scrambling engenders a solid ache around the waist-line and behind the thighs that is the chiefest detriment to jungle-hunting—but both of them were naturally hard-muscled men and both in good condition. The little interval for lunch was quite sufficient to send them on refreshed, putting the tortuous, cautious miles behind them.

IT WAS late afternoon before they were brought to a stop. Right through the middle of a stretch of fairly open bamboo jungle where they had hoped to make speedy going a creek wound into the distance on either side.

Not very wide; yet wide enough to indicate a probable stretch of a considerable number of miles inland involving a long détour into the heart of the pigmy country. Though by no means too wide to swim. And yet——

Bir Jung picked up a stone and essayed a tentative shot at one of those pieces of slimy flotsam that are always suspicious in tropical streams. The stone missed, but the floating débris sank quietly under. Other motionless logs in the vicinity silently disappeared.

Bir Jung laughed.

"Here is opportunity for the *sahib* to construct his masterpiece of bridgework. With bamboo can we— *Awa-tche!*"

His jesting voice broke off in a startled yelp, and he snatched at Westerman's arm and jerked him violently toward himself. Westerman's coat flew out as he staggered, and he was conscious of a soft *phut* under the armpit. Within the same fraction of a second both were behind a bamboo clump. Bir Jung, for the first time since Westerman had known him, was pale under his dark skin and trembling with an unexpected emotion.

"*Khoda kerim!* Truly were the gods merciful in that I turned in time. Else the *sahib*— *Atzh-tcha-tcha.* Never was death closer."

With a hand still unsteady he drew the little six-inch sliver of tufted bamboo out of the coat, on the drab khaki cloth of which it left a tiny smear of black stickiness. He closed his eyes and recovered control of himself with a deep-drawn breath.

"God is merciful. In ten seconds does a strong man die from this. With mine own eyes have I seen."

Westerman realized that the passing weakness of emotion had been on his account. But there was no time for thanks or compliments.

"I'll owe you for that, good friend," was all he snapped out. "What did you see? Where? How many?"

"I saw but one, *sahib*. A face of a devil, very black, with a long bamboo tube to its lips. And then the gods, to whom I shall give fifty spotless kids, gave to my hand speed and strength."

"Hm!"

Westerman thought aloud rather than spoke.

"I suppose we're not lucky enough for it to be a single lone hunter. And I suppose they think we have guns; else they'd rush. Thank Pete for the creek behind us so that they can come only from one direction. What now, Bir Jung?"

The Gurkha had but one desperate suggestion.

"Perchance, *sahib*, by running we may outstrip these men who are little, and, gaining the sea which God knows is how far to our left, we may swim out; for it is said that these monkey folk can not swim."

Westerman shook his head.

"Never. We'd beat them in the open; but they'd duck through the jungle tangle like monkeys, and we'd be in a trap. We're better off right here."

Bamboo grows in clumps, dense palisades

from six to thirty feet in circumference and anything from two to twenty feet apart. Between them, except for an occasional fallen stem, is clear ground carpeted only with its own leaves; for bamboo permits nothing else to live with it.

It was clearly the best, in fact the only, thing to do to keep their heads and await developments from behind their shelter. From there at least, failing everything else, there was the last desperate chance of the creek.

Presently Westerman shouted—why, he never could have told, but a keen observer would have detected excitement in his usually impassive voice:

"There he goes! There's one of them!"

"And to the left another with a bow and arrow," came from Bir Jung's side of the clump.

A minute or so later another little figure was seen flitting between two far clumps, closing in to join the advance skirmishers. And then another. As they shifted their positions, Westerman counted seven in all. Dwarfish creatures, not more than four and a half feet in height; stark naked as the apes; sturdy and with demoniac faces.

Three of them carried long six-foot blow-guns, and one a bow. The others seemed to have nothing. Evidently a stray hunting-party which had chanced upon them.

Finding no reprisal, they grew bolder. One came into full view and tried a long shot with his blow-gun. At that distance it was easy to see the missile and to step aside. It rattled harmlessly among the bamboo stems. Westerman shouted again; a whoop of excited defiance.

But still no answering shot. The little black men chattered vigorously at one another; jumping up, crouching, pointing, gesticulating with a wealth of interpretive emotion. Their speech was so limited in expression that they had to eke out their meaning with considerable acting. It was easy to guess what they were urging upon each other.

Still they were suspicious as wild animals; but, gaining courage from their immunity, they dodged several clumps nearer. One of them with a blow-gun suddenly started running swiftly to gain a vantage point from which he could attack the strangers on the flank.

Inspiration born of desperation came to Westerman. He snatched from his pocket one of the big pebbles he had been carrying as bird ammunition and hurled it with all his force at the runner. Bir Jung insisted ever after that one of his gods had personally directed this shot. The heavy stone struck the man square, just forward at the ear, and he dropped as suddenly as if it had been a pistol ball.

"*Shabash!*" came a wild yell from Bir Jung.

And "Strike one!" whooped Westerman with half hysterical triumph; and, whooping, fell flat to the ground just in time to let a long arrow zip past above him. Bir Jung yelled again and leaped high in the air, making his great knife sing around his head.

"More stones," gasped Westerman as he jumped to his feet and hurled another smashing shot at a figure that was just taking aim.

It missed the man but crashed among the dry bamboos with a startling rattle that sent him scurrying for shelter. Repeated shots held them at that distance for a while.

"*Arrh-hrr-hrr-hrah!*" came a deep-throated shout from Bir Jung, who danced and beat upon his chest in a frenzy at his own inaction.

It was the war shout of the Gurkhas, uttered when about to charge in upon the enemy, and carried then as an accompaniment to the ensuing horrible sound of butchers at work upon their meat-blocks.

"*Arrh-hrr-hr!* Slay them, *sahib!* Slaughter the apemen. *Awaiee*, would that I had the skill!"

"Look out, Bir Jung," yelped Westerman as two of the black figures detached themselves and raced toward his left in a similar flanking movement as before.

A stone glanced from the spine of one, and he dropped to his hands and knees and crawled slowly behind shelter. The other wheeled, fired a vicious arrow and disappeared like an evil apparition.

"*Whee-ee!* Strike two!"

Westerman's voice was pitched high in unbridled excitement. A volley of stones broke up a quite determined advance upon his own front.

"Yip-ee-ee! We're holding 'em, Bir Jung!"

AND then Bir Jung went berserk. To remain inactive in that battle was too much for his heredity.

"*Arrh - hrr - hrr - hrah!* I come! *Arrh-hrr-hr!* Bir Jung and Death are one!"

Shouting like an Achilles, he rushed from his shelter, running low like a charging panther. Head and jaw strained forward till the neck sinews stood tense as ropes. Eyes blazing. Whirling his deadly *kookerie* knife high and shouting his hoarse battle yell, he charged, careless of shield or shelter, straight at the main group of the poisonous black men.

Westerman saw him duck to an arrow from the side, leap away from the aim of the blow-gun; and then the madness came upon him too. It was impossible to leave his ally to the charge alone. He yelled a hysterical encouragement and raced out after him. Yet he retained enough of judgment to act as a covering barrage. Where a figure showed he hurled a stone, and yelped again as he saw its effect.

The savages had seen natives, and they had seen white men. They had fought them both before. But this breed of howling maniacs with its strange weapons was a new sort of terror. Their hesitation was of irresolution rather than of valor, and was no more than momentary. Then they turned to duck like black rabbits among the bamboo clusters.

Westerman's long legs quickly overtook a sturdy little wild beast who screamed horribly as the hand reached for his ebony shoulder, and then turned in a flash and bit viciously at the wrist. Westerman closed with the little ——, and together they came to the ground. At the same moment he heard a thick *chuck!* as of a blade among butcher-blocks.

For the next few minutes he was kept surprisingly busy with his captive. The little savage was as poweful and as agile as an ape; and he bit and scratched with the same virulent ferocity. He wriggled and twisted with every instinctive art of an animal. Westerman could hear some one on just the other side of his bamboo clump squealing horribly like a pig; but it was all he could do in spite of his own vastly more powerful hands to keep astride of his captive and hold him down.

And then suddenly the squirming body relaxed and lay limp. Westerman was confident of a trick and pressed the harder upon the man. But there was no subterfuge. Some thing had just given way—Westerman never knew what—and the man was swiftly dead.

He was able at last to look about him to learn how his ally fared. Just in time to see the finale of an extraordinary tragedy. Away to the left the savage with the bow was running like a deer, leaping fallen stems and dodging others with an extraordinary agility. After him Bir Jung with a great red blade. But the man, a well-muscled little imp, gained steadily.

Bir Jung realized that the other was the speedier; and then the end came with startling swiftness. Suddenly the Gurkha stopped, poised himself a moment on widespread feet like a javelin thrower, heaved up his wicked weapon and hurled it after the runner.

The heavy, curved blade whirled through the air, a broad streak of red, and struck the man square between the shoulders. The wide point penetrated just behind the shoulder-blade, and the weight of the rest of it, whirling round, crashed through bone and muscle under the armpit in a ghastly gash clear through to the chest. Westerman shut his eyes.

Bir Jung returned, stalking among the bamboos, the expression on his grim face showing the conscious pride of a master of his weapon. But all that Westerman said was—

"You might have let that last beggar go."

"Never," Bir Jung maintained with stout confidence. "What avails the slaughter of a hundred if one may escape and summon vengeance?"

"Hm! Guess you're right," Westerman admitted shortly.

He was feeling the swift reaction from the furious excitement through which he had just passed.

Bir Jung was more accustomed to battle and murder and sudden death. To him the thing had been a very creditable fight put up against peculiarly horrible odds. That victory, weaponless against little black —— with poisoned arrows, was an adventure of which he would reminisce over the campfires in the long years to come.

"Yes," Westerman agreed ruminatively, thinking back on the happenings of his life. "I suppose it *was* an adventure at last."

He got up and shook himself, feeling the dry taste in his mouth with screwed-up lips.

"Come, let's get out of here."

"Yet a little while, *sahib*," Bir Jung begged. "This has been a matter—the deliverance of the *sahib* from that first arrow and that subsequent great battle—for which it is meet to give the proper offering. Just a small *puja, sahib;* and we shall travel with the greater protection for it."

Westerman shrugged and sat down again without a word to watch his queer ally, reverted back in a sudden leap to primitive hill man, a strange anomaly of acute intelligence inextricably mixed up with superstition. The Gurkha ran busily to select four flat stones. With these he built a sort of hearth, a base with two sides and a back. On the base he scratched with the point of his *kookerie* the triangle and the circle—he could not for a moment have told why; to him they were just the prescribed markings; yet they were obviously the symbols again of the Hindu trilogy and the endless cycle of life. Then he cut three wands and stuck them upright into the ground behind the altar. To each he tied a little streamer of linen torn from his waistband.

"To Jahala and to Yabosh and to Zimri," he muttered.

Westerman wondered what distortion of the great Triad were these three mountain godlings. He even asked an explanation. But Bir Jung was absorbed in the rite.

"For the sacrifice is blood necessary," he sang to himself.

Blood was in profusion everywhere. He brought a gruesome leaf-scoop of it and with his forefinger daubed on the upright back and side stones the eye and the open hand and the knife. Raw earth was a necessary adjunct; a little flat mound of it on the base stone.

Westerman's dejection had passed in the interest of this extraordinary rite. He wanted to know the meaning of things; but the Gurkha either could not or would not explain.

"Proof of the victory," he muttered.

And he trotted off to collect the weapons of the slain, even the far-outlying bowman's. From each corpse he cut a little tuft of hair.

"That the gods may recognize each in his proper place and appoint him as attendant upon the victor."

He knelt, sitting back on his heels before his altar with his collection of relics and produced his flint and steel. Westerman hated to interfere; but he felt himself bound to remonstrate. The devotee came back out of his dim ancestral past with sudden flashing eyes and hand on knife-hilt. A moment he crouched like some outraged druid priest. Then understanding came into his eyes.

"But a little fire, *sahib,*" he urged. "The merest tonguelet of flame to consummate the *puja.* Later we leave the whole to burn and go swiftly from this place."

He built a tiny wisp of fire on the little mound of earth and singed the tufts of hair. There followed a mysterious rite of laying the great blade across the stones so that the acrid smoke curled round it, and then of pressing the weapon to his forehead and lips and heart while he muttered some droning incantation.

Then he sprang up quickly, his face shining with the sublime exhilaration of one who has confessed and cleared his soul of all obligation.

"It is finished," he said happily. "A great fight, properly consummated. These weapons we leave to burn and depart with speed under the protection of the gods."

"Wait a minute."

Westerman halted suddenly. "I want one of those blow-guns and a quiver with all the darts. Many's the time I've tweaked a cat on the back fence with a bean-shooter; and I don't see why I couldn't hunt grub with one of those a heap better and more quietly than heaving rocks. And I'd advise you to bring along the bow and arrows."

But Bir Jung would have none of the new-fangled weapon. He could hurl his boomerang blade a lot straighter, he maintained stoutly, than he could shoot an arrow.

"Let us go from this evil place with speed," he insisted.

"Let's," agreed Westerman whole-heartedly. "How are we going to get on the other side of this darn creek?"

CHAPTER XV

PROFESSOR HEZEKIAH IMRAY, FIGHTER

PROFESSOR IMRAY was very much annoyed. He felt sure that his effects were being tampered with. Some one had been going through his baggage. Not with the same swift crudity as on the steamer. There was more time here to do a scientific job.

Nothing could be definitely pointed to as a proof of the tampering. Yet the small disarrangements of little things convinced the professor that his room had been gone through as with a fine-toothed comb. He gnashed his teeth at the thought. He had imbibed a powerful prejudice against Sendings.

Never a person who waited to weigh up pros and cons, he went and told the chief commissioner about it.

The chief commissioner immediately regarded the matter with a judicial air. What reason had the professor to believe? Etc., etc. This was a matter not lightly to be disposed of; for if indeed this foul thing had happened to a guest in the chief commissioner's very house, here was *lèse majesté* of the most blasphemous enormity.

The professor raged. Why, —— and blazes, hadn't his things been searched on the way over and himself set upon?

Really, old top! What a bally extraordinary occurrence! And so on throughout the gamut of expressions of surprize. And what might be the reason for his mysterious assault?

Well, there had been a, er—curio. Er—valuable specimen, and——

The professor was finding himself in deep water. Further interested inquiries as to what amazing connection could all that have with his present residence in the convict settlement thrust him yet deeper. He thought perhaps; and he didn't know; and—well, —— me, the whole mess wasn't much of his affair anyhow; those other two young fools had just bungled things up generally.

The chief commissioner was a man inflated with pride of position; but he was no fool. So there *was* a connection after all between the professor and that other carelessly offensive American! This matter needed careful cogitation.

One of the curses of officialdom is that there are so many other higher officials to answer to for one's mistakes. People who came with introductions like the professor's were not lightly to be mistaken. And even chief commissioners are mortal.

This chief commissioner was wise in his generation. He tactfully let the matter drop—for the present—and exerted himself to soothe the irritated old gentleman. For quite the greatest of the curses of officialdom is that even the most honest and impeccable official never feels quite comfortable about the effect that reports carried by spiteful strangers may have at headquarters. The Chief Commissioner offered a sop to this spiteful stranger.

"Oh, by the way, old chap, I've something here that will interest you. My bearer—my body-servant, you know—brought it to me."

There was the master Oriental hand. Through the commissioner himself.

"It's a bone hatchet which some coolie man scratched out of the south midden."

"Wh-where? Let me see. Where is this south midden?" The professor was instantly aroused and eager.

Well, the chief commissioner explained exactly as if to a tourist. The aborigines had various favorite camping-spots which they departed from when the accumulation of household refuse became too foul for even their hardy systems, and returned to after a period when God's good rain had disinfected the site. That this had gone on for ages and that the islanders had not advanced a single step in evolution since prehistoric times was proven by the fact that some of these dumps, or middens, of close packed garbage were as much as thirty feet deep and afforded a collection of broken potsherds and stone beads and arrow-heads and things most interesting to any one who had the time and inclination to get a spade and wallow in the stuff.

"*Aa-arr-rh!*" the professor snarled in the extremity of exasperation at the long lecture. "I know all that. All savages have had middens; and most that we know about their lives has come out of them."

A piece of information which was evidently news to the chief commissioner.

"Where is this south midden of yours, and how do I get there quickest?"

"Oh, er—well, it's in the southern extremity of what we call the extension. It was discovered as the clearing was advanced for cultivation. I shall send Lieutenant Tremaine with you to show it to you."

"*Psha-aa-a*, I don't want any young fool of a lieutenant bothering me. Know nothing. Get in the way. Ask imbecile questions. Give me your bearer and a couple of coolies. I want him to show me the exact hole out of which this thing came."

There was no denying the gentle request. The chief commissioner apologized for that his duties that afternoon did not permit him personally to accompany the professor and do the honors over the garbage-heap. He ordered the bearer with the ring around his neck to show the *sahib* the exact place, and signed an order for two men to be assigned out of one of the working-squads and to requisition digging-tools.

All of which was just about as the master mind had planned that it should be.

The bearer led the professor down to the model dock and took him on board of one of the launches that ran on hourly schedules. But it was not the launch that went to the landing nearest to the extension. Instead it ran to the eastern inlet and landed at a point which was nearest to village 28.

"*Sahib,*" said the bearer, salaaming low, "the way is yet far. With the Heaven-Born's permission I will arrange for a *palki.*"

The professor, his mind entirely occupied with the midden, paid scanty attention. But he trusted the man quite as much as the commissioner did. So presently there arrived a *palki*, a litter effect, composed very simply of a canvas hammock slung on a bamboo pole, and carried on the shoulders of four men and draped with a colored native muslin—"to keep the sun off, *sahib.*"

The queen of the harem could have been transported unseen in this.

When Professor Imray awoke he was being set down in a long, low hut with two windows opening into it and a raised platform at one end. He was assisted out of the litter politely enough; and then the bearer and the four carriers and the two diggers and a few apparently unnecessary hangers-on filled the doorway. A man with a clever, very crafty face, loose lips and a cruel mouth who spoke a little English, addressed him without any unnecessary preliminaries.

"Misterr Imrai, sar, itt is verree unhappy necessary for you must give to me two daggers from your keeping."

The professor peered at him with screwed-up eyes over his spectacles and failed utterly to understand. What had all this to do with middens? The man repeated with impatience.

"This two knifes, keys of Soma treasure, I must take."

Some impression of impertinence began to take form in the professor's mind. This must be the inquisitive scoundrel who had been searching his room.

"Wh-what? Keys? Blast your impertinence! —— me, sir, I'm going to report this thing to——"

The man wasted no more time.

"Seize him and take them," he ordered shortly.

Something happened then which had never fallen to the professor's lot before. Coolie men, as he called all natives indiscriminately, advanced without any deference at all and laid hands upon him.

With the shock of this indignity came the realization that he had been lured into some sort of trap; that here was some connection with the people who had been trying with such consistent effort to get possession of the daggers. He was about to be robbed of the trust which Westerman had so suddenly and mysteriously conveyed to him.

To a dignified old gentleman unaccustomed to being thwarted the shock was a considerable one. He was going to be deprived—sacrilege unthinkable—of that which meant his opportunity to get some money to carry on his research work with. Abomination of desolation!

Professor Hezekiah Imray, cultured scientist of at least four generations of doctor's degrees from Harvard, went as suddenly berserk as had Bir Jung, scion of some dozen generations of a fighting caste.

He screamed with shrill rage and jerked free of the dark hands that held him. Totally unsuspecting such an outburst, the men were scarcely more than touching him.

He rushed at the man who had propounded the blasphemous suggestion and kicked him very violently in the shins—as he recollected from his youth all black men should be treated. The man howled aloud in agony and snatched up his leg to hug the lacerated tibia.

The professor aimed another fearful kick at the other leg. But the clawing hands were upon him once more, and he only grazed it sufficiently to tear the skin. With another siren screech he turned and beat with his frail old fists at the faces which leered at him. Some of the leers even his efforts turned into snarls of anger.

As they closed all round him one unfortunate let his arm be turned behind his back. Some school-day memory of the arm-twisting torture came to the old man, and he seized the limb and twisted with all the force at his command and hung on doggedly till his senses reeled under the blows that fell upon his head and the yells of the tortured man died away in the rushing sound in his ears.

THEY brought him, dazed and tottering, before their leader. Khoda Bux slapped him savagely in the mouth; and the old man's head lolled over and hung forward limp.

"Search him!" he growled.

It was simple. The confiding old gentleman had carried the priceless keys in his hip pocket.

Khoda Bux let out a wild shout of triumph as he reached out an avid hand to grab them. There was a note in his voice of a ruthless animal which sees at last in its grasp the prey its has stalked by scent alone for so long and so craftily. His face assumed an expression almost benign, fatherly rather, as if he were already a benevolent ruler addressing his subjects. Only the eyes could never disguise the impression of cruelty.

He hid the daggers, the all-important keys, away in his waist-band. They were nothing for the common herd to see or be interested in. Then he mounted to his platform and issued regal orders.

"Let the people hear the voice. The hour has come and the time is accomplished. All that was to be prepared is finished. What I planned to do I have done. Good. Let the runners go forth swiftly. Let the men be here by dark. *This very night we go from this devil's island.* Let it be done as I have said. As for this old dotard, for the present bind him and throw him aside."

He sat and watched with swelling pride as various of the men went out to do his bidding. Another opportunity to assert authority occurred to him.

"Thou Dhunnu, and Kheera and Jathroo, go to the boat and see that all is in readiness. See that the waterskins be fresh. Dass-Mera, in thy hands is the keeping of the food."

The men went, and he sat on and became immersed in his thoughts. Visions came to him. Head dropped forward on his chest, staring unseeing through the open door, the course of his visions could be guessed from the expressions which chased each other across his face.

In that position and half-light the lines of meanness were shaded down. There was a certain strength in that face besides the crafty cleverness. Dreams followed one another. Dreams of avarice, of power, of revenge on the accursed *sirkar*, of a pompous court with obsequious attendants—all these could be read in his eyes, and through all of them stalked the ruthless ego.

So he dreamed on till dusk came. Men began to come in, summoned by the messengers. They clustered silently about the door, afraid to disturb the great one. Presently the whole score of them were gathered and waiting impatient. So ready is the Oriental to accord authority to him who grasps it.

At last the Napoleon of Andaman Island aroused himself. He shook himself from his abstraction and frowned instinctively at the men. Then he stepped swiftly from the platform and retired into the rear room.

It was his preparation for his formal accession to his throne. During the minutes that elapsed the half-witted servitor slunk in and placed a lighted wick floating in a clay saucer at each corner of the platform, salaaming low to the empty chair, as that glory-craving paranoiac had taught him to do.

The megalomaniac came back resplendent. He mounted his throne and frowned for silence, his hand resting in regal pose on the hilt of the royal sword; and it had to be admitted that he was by no means awkward with the thing. He held it as if the feel and the use of the sword were no new thing to him. Proper deference having been accorded to his presence, he spoke.

"My people, the day that the Lord Siva promised has arrived. I speak not of what we have to do. Each knows his part from long teaching. I speak only of the triumph that awaits us. The day of the *sirkar* is written. The rulers of Hind are already dead. All Hind returns to us; to *me*, Khoda Bux, who have wrested it from the accursed Englesi."

There followed a period of grandiloquent rhetoric. The man was crazy with his vision of power. His "people" endured with shufflings and mutterings. Only the last of his speech roused them at all again.

"—and, I tell you, my people, ye who have served me well; hear it. Ye shall be my viziers and my ministers."

There was no demonstration such as might have been expected from a group of white men who had just been promised princely appointments. Only a clattering chorus of:

"*Shabash!* The *Raj* has spoken."

Orientals are not very enthusiastic about getting something until they have definitely got it.

"It is finished. Let the going be swift," was the royal dictum.

But a delay occurred.

"Great one," ventured a man more intelligent than the rest, "what is to be done with this *sahib* here?"

The great one recollected with an air of nonchalance. In his vast schemes the disposal of so paltry a thing as a mere white man had found no place. He regarded the prisoner with the judicial air that he loved, chin in hand and looking stern.

Then a small smile began to play around his loose lips. The eyes glittered with malevolent mirth. He nodded appreciatively to himself, and his face glimmered in the half-light, the most cruel thing that the professor, lying in the corner by the dais, had ever seen. It was his great good fortune that he was unable to understand the verdict.

"What is to be done? So! The dog raised his foot to me. And ye, my people; there is not one of you who has not his own feud with the white man. Good! In half an hour we go from this place without fear of return. Therefore—" he paused for the sake of the effect—"I give him to you to make sport with."

CHAPTER XVI

SPORT

THERE was a long silence. The men gathered there were none of them of a mental caliber anywhere approaching their leader's—which is why he was leader. Their mental development was not far removed from the primitive; and the primitive mind, of course, thinks visually. It is unable to grasp an idea in the abstract; it must build a picture of it first. Time was necessary therefore for the startling thought to take visual form.

It was with slow progression then that furtive animal grins began to show. The stealthy looks met, and like animals the men understood without speech. Fortunate indeed for the professor that he did not understand.

Sixty per cent. of the men condemned to the Andaman Islands have been convicted of murder. Once lodged there, and realizing the hopelessness of escape, they accept their position with true Oriental apathy. Dull, without initiative, they fall into the helpless frame of mind which enables them to be employed on all manner of service with perfect safety—as long as they remain hopeless and helpless.

But it required no more than the suggestion from the dominant mind to arouse the latent animal in these men on the point of escaping beyond the reach of retribution. The hate that had smoldered so long against the white *sahibs* who had condemned them to this place was only just beneath the hardened crust of repression and was very ready to be fanned into the same fiendish blaze that surged through the ranks of the *sepoys* during the hideous days of the mutiny.

One, more blood-lustful than the rest, made the first suggestion.

"Without eyelids, brothers, it is not good to look at the sun."

That was the first push that set the grisly ball rolling. Bright minds immediately elaborated.

"Salt, too, have I seen added."

"True, brother; also the bamboo slivers under the finger-nails."

Attractive counter-suggestions followed fast, and it developed inevitably into an argument, which in turn developed as inevitably into an orgy of competition, each animal wit, unable to originate anything for itself, looking for approbation by improving upon another's bestial thought. Inevitably again with such natures the contest developed into a series of heated quarrels, no man willing to accept another's emendation without capping it himself with a yet more brutal detail.

The half-hour sped toward its close. The master criminal, assuming a haughty aloofness from the petty affairs of his underlings, called the five more minutes of play. A gross gorilloid brute shouted an ascendency over the rest by sheer force of lung.

"*Wah*, brothers, what avails this monkey talk? The time is sped. Let us make a finish with speed. Let us—" his must have been a peculiarly bestial butchery—"let me rip the Christian dog and rend the bowel from him as a rope."

The idea, while lacking some of the longer-drawn refinement of some of the artists in crime, was accepted perforce by general acclaim. As many as could seized the bewildered old man and dragged him to the center before the lamps. Their faces had reverted to the pure animal. Eyes glared brute ferocity. Teeth and gums showed in throaty grins. Lips slavered expectantly.

"Who has a knife? Cursed be the *sirkar!* Dhunnu, though, has a fragment of hoop-iron."

Dhunnu, on the outskirts near the door, became suddenly important. He pressed against the unwilling crowd to make a passage for himself— And then suddenly, while men counted, his eyes bulged in a horrible stare. A moment only; then the eyelids drooped, very tired, and he sank quietly from the knees, his hands slipping limply down the bodies in front of him.

"*Ya thoba! Kya*——"

It was the quivalent of:

"Good gosh! What tha——"

The man who spoke snapped the exclamation short with convulsive jaws—just in time to bite into a thin sliver of bamboo that had entered through his cheek.

While he still pawed weakly with his hands in the air before their startled faces another man leaped up with a yelp and snatched at something that had whispered in out of the night and grazed his naked belly; but it had only grazed and passed on. Another plucked the thing with an oath from his side and held it before the light. Yet within the same second they both grew heavy-eyed and sagged from the knees. Then understanding came.

"*Awaie! Bap-re-bap!* The little black men are upon us! We be dead men!"

The high-pitched yell brought home to the slower-witted the one abiding awful terror of their lives. With animal howls they rushed for the door—and met the round muzzle of a long tube. Behind it in the outer dimness a tall, very ragged, very coldly grim figure.

The foremost hurled themselves back with shrieks of mortal horror and clawed with brute madness at the faces of those who pressed against them. The gorilloid convict gave out a bellow and made a single enormous ape leap for the nearest window. A swift arc of light seemed to pass horizontally almost through his head above the ear, and it opened up and lay over in two halves like a split pomegranate. Immediately afterward the dim window-frame was filled by a broad figure which loomed like a devil against the night.

"*Arrh-hrr-hrr-hrah!*"

The figure leaped far out into the room; and immediately the howling bedlam was augmented with shrieks and the thick, meaty *chuck!* of the butcher-blocks.

From the door came renewed yelps of awful fear, and the stampede surged for the farther window. Westerman was behind them stabbing silently with a cluster of deadly darts held by the tufts bunched in his hands. The system of fighting revolted him, but the need was desperate.

"The windows! Guard the windows, *sahib!*" shouted the devil who raged in the thick of the mess. "And the door! Alas, that we be only two and the exits three!"

True. Two were too few to fight within the room and to guard the exits at the same time. Those who lived realized the same thing, and the three exits became darkened by a series of leaping forms. Those who stayed did not live.

The great war hookerie was as deadly as the sticky slivers of bamboo, and swifter. The Gurkha stroke is not like the hideous, disemboweling upward rip of the tall Northwestern border men, though its effect is quite as terrible. The Gurkha is a short man and slashes therefore with a horizontal wrist stroke sheer across the belly. The same thing, only different.

The professor had mercifully fainted in a pool of hot bowels. Only one other remained. He stood shrunk back against the corner by the door to the inner room. Half-dazed, he appeared at the swift tragedy that had descended upon his mad dreams of magnificence.

His impulse had been to retreat to his habitual sanctum from the herd. His realization that there was no exit came too late. In his hand was the royal sword, naked; and as the complete realization of the sudden disaster grew upon him the fear in his eyes began to harden to the desperation of an animal at bay.

Westerman fingered the deadly darts in uncertainty and stooped to roll a huddled body off the blow-gun. But Bir Jung stopped him. His voice was grim with a cold fatalism.

"Let be, *sahib*. This thing was ordained. The man is mine."

Very methodically he tore a rag from the nearest corpse and wiped his right hand dry. Then the hilt of his great blade. Westerman understood and made no remonstrance.

Bir Jung surveyed the shambles in which he stood with disfavor.

"Here is ill fighting," he muttered. "These dead dogs must be thrown aside."

A sudden inspiration of the grimmest humor came to him. He turned fiercely to the would-be monarch.

Thou, too," he ordered. "Help clear thy death-ground. *Sahib*, by favor; hold him with the blow-gun that he attempt neither flight nor treachery."

It was a grisly business. The flickering light of the two oil wicks fell on two men, one in regal robes and the other very ragged, piling dead bodies against the wall to make space for a duel which would add one more to the number. Westerman stood apart and watched, fascinated.

Khoda Bux, to do him credit, now that he was cornered, was far from the panic-stricken thing that might have been expected. With a callousness that was an indication of his complete disregard for human life he pushed his erstwhile fellows aside with his feet. He even displayed a certain truculence.

"When I have slain thee," he demanded, "will the *sahib* then let me go free?"

"Fear not," growled Bir Jung. "All history does not show a man who has spat upon a *thakur* of Bhatgaon and lived."

The man barked an ugly laugh.

"Good. History changes ever. Enough. There is space sufficient."

Bir Jung merely motioned him to the middle with his *kookerie* point.

KHODA BUX stood in the typical Oriental position, feet braced wide apart and blade raised for a downward stroke. An awkward poise and defenseless to the straight blade or very slightly curved saber developed by the white man to deliver a thrust as well as a cut; but good enough against another curved tulwar or simitar shape that can offer no point. It was clear that his earlier unconscious handling of his sword had been proof that he was more than a novice.

Bir Jung crouched on his toes with bent knees. Kookerie fighting, to be scientific, should be conducted with blade and shield. In this case, with his short, heavy weapon alone, he had to rely on his own sheer agility. The odds seemed horribly against him. And yet he grinned an invitation.

Khoda Bux accepted it with malevolent confidence. He sprang and struck. Quick as light Bir Jung ducked under his arm and slashed as he sped by. The blade ripped a wide gash through the embroidered waistband, which should have been the swift end. But beneath the cloth it rasped on steel and slipped harmlessly on.

"Aho!" shouted Khoda Bux at the omen. "The Holy Three favor me! The dagger of Siva is my protection."

"Once," grunted Bir Jung, and crouched in sinewy watchfulness again.

With his disadvantage in reach he could hardly attack. His strategy was to make the other lead. Again he offered his smiling invitation; and again Khoda Bux struck.

This time Bir Jung whipped his body aside and swung heavily at the curved blade. Full on the broad of the tulwar the kookerie rang; but Khoda Bux barked his confidence again. In a test of steel there was every probability that his simitar, hand-forged and tempered with the art that had come through the ages from Damascus, was far superior for the cruder craft of the hill folk.

"The sword of Siva the Destroyer," he shouted his triumph.

"Twice," grunted Bir Jung. "I strike no more till the end."

Khoda Bux was exalted with confidence now. He leaped and struck, and struck again. Bir Jung dodged and ducked with uncanny activity, exhibiting a speed of footwork such as is shown only by the cat animals and by mountain-trained legs.

To Westerman, watching with horrid fascination, it seemed a dozen times that the long, curved sword reached within an inch of Bir Jung's head before he could move. Yet each time it whistled an inch past his shoulder and hip. And each time, as he began to gage the speed and sweep of the stroke, he was beginning to dare to stand closer and ever closer. Khoda Bux called viciously upon his gods and struck ever more wildly.

At last Bir Jung judged the reach of his blade and arm to be sufficient. He played the old trick that all fighters of all times and weapons have played, and which, if played with sufficient skill, always succeeds. He pretended to trip and stumble, holding his balance only by the tip of his blade on the ground well to the fore. Khoda Bux shouted the name of Siva and whirled up his sword.

The trick had been played with supreme skill. Bir Jung's swift lift on ready toes was almost as impossible for the eye to follow as was the straight upward slash. The crotch stroke that Monsieur Duchèsne, the great saber duelist, thought he had invented.

It is the most difficult and deadly, and to Orientals the most insulting, of strokes. And, like the trick, if done with sufficient skill it always succeeds. The great blade stayed its course well up against the breast bone.

As once before, Westerman shut his eyes.

When he looked again Bir Jung was sheathing his blade with the happy expression of a very young and innocent idol.

"The weak is yet to run, and my honor is clean," he said as one calling attention to a foreordained certainty.

With matter-of-fact coolness he rolled up his ragged sleeve and stooped to grope in the smoking mess of bowels. Westerman retched. Out of the foulness the passionless Gurkha fished the three daggers. Calmly he wiped them on a loose end of the embroidered sash and presented them to Westerman.

"The favor of the gods is made manifest. The three keys are one," he said. "Come, let us go from this place."

CHAPTER XVII

THE ORDER WHICH MUST BE OBEYED

THE three sat in the office of the chief commissioner. Or rather, the professor sat; Bir Jung stood at respectful attention before greatness; and Westerman lounged with studied carelessness on the window ledge.

The chief commissioner would have had them all stand. He was feeling in his most judicial mood. There were many things to be explained; many of his convicts to be accounted for; and he had summoned his secretary, Lieutenant Tremaine, to act as court stenographer. This matter was ample reason for a formal occasion.

But the three refused to consider themselves prisoners in the dark. The professor was in the most explosive mood of his career. What he had gone through the night before had left his nervous system on the ragged edge. Westerman had smiled a cheerful, "Good morning, commissioner *sahib*," and had committed the sacrilege of lighting his pipe in the sacred presence. Bir Jung was the only one whose training had inculcated into him the proper reverence for a chief commissioner. But his lone deference was insufficient to appease outraged dignity. The chief commissioner then was in a mood almost rivaling the professor's.

"This whole business is most unsatisfactory," he grumbled, "and I feel it my duty to detain all three of you until I can communicate the case to the Viceroy in Council."

The professor gave a snort like an irate wild boar. Westerman ceased swinging his legs long enough to say:

"Detain? Goshamighty, you ought to reward us. We've busted up a conspiracy such as the history of your island has never known. If those twenty convicts had got away you'd a been given a swift official boot abaft the dignity complex."

This was unnecessarily coarse, but Westerman had been exasperated beyond endurance by the ponderous procedure of official inquiry, which had been none too delicately conducted itself. There had been suspicions and aspersions. Words such as "bally rotter," "adventurer" and "bounder" had been used—the last two apparently synonymous in the official mind. Still, his intentional slang was, it must be admitted, a trifle hard on sensitive authority. The chief commissioner was not keen psychologist enough to let it pass.

"Mr. Westerman," he said with the extremity of *hauteur*, "I beg you to understand that a commissioner of the Indian Civil Service is never reprimanded. He *may* be asked to explain his reasons. That is all."

"Hm!" grunted Westerman. "A boot by any other name would smell as rank. But we've gone over explanations and reasons a dozen times. What we want to know is whether you'll sign our requisition for passage on tomorrow's steamer."

"Not until the matter of the daggers is settled, Mr. Westerman—if indeed I then decide to concede a great deal and to accept your explanation as satisfactory."

"The matter of the daggers *is* settled," said Westerman with finality. "You say that the loot, being a revolutionary fund, should be confiscated to the Government. All right. Supposing then you call your guard and the half of them which will be left get the daggers away from us; where will you be? You will have three curios to send home to the family.

"How's your hide-bound Government going to find out where to go with them to gather in the goods? Are we going to write you out a chart of instructions and hand it to you on a silver plate? Shucks! Don't be foolish, man."

Never had a chief commissioner of the heaven-born I. C. S. been spoken to so plainly. This thing was almost blasphemy. Before a secretary too. It was undermining the morals of the coming generation. The chief commissioner was put to it to retain official courtesy—which means the saying of unpleasant things in the most perfect of English grammar.

Westerman listened in rapt silence, trying his hardest to look like a cherub. Then he put another match to his pipe.

"Commissioner *sahib*, we seem to be wasting time. I'm quite sure you will see your way to conceding a great deal when you let yourself cogitate a while about how your boss over at headquarters will look at a conspiracy which was hatched and carried out under the noses of your whole outfit to the point where they'd built a boat and would have got away with it if we hadn't come along with the monkey wrench. Shucks! Let's call the deal square and go home to lunch."

He slouched out, hands in pockets, looking as tough as he talked. The chief commissioner broke a pencil in two between his fingers, but refrained from biting the furniture till his secretary should have withdrawn. Outside, Westerman straightened out his humped shoulders, stepped out of the slouch and laughed.

"I suppose it's a shame to ride the pompous old turkey so hard; but, gee whiz, his sacred official red tape did get my goat."

Bir Jung was properly horrified at the flouting of one so nearly related to the Deity.

"Think you, *sahib*, that he will grant passes for the steamer?" he asked with misgiving.

"Sure," laughed Westerman. "He is afraid of the tales we might tell about him. Of course we wouldn't; but his official mind can't grasp that. Come on over to the old bridge and let's arrange how to tackle friend Soma with the Three-in-One combination key."

It was not at all necessary to discuss plans for dealing with the old *fakir*. It had been quite definitely established by himself that some mysterious command was conveyed by the symbolism of the trinity of keys which compelled him to deliver the fund in his keeping to the bearers. What Westerman really wanted was an excuse to go and relax in his favorite spot and indulge in the pleasant occupation of enjoying in retrospect the triumphant outcome of their strenuous endeavors, and in prospect the reward of their labors. Just like any other overgrown boy he wanted a holiday, and the ruins of the bridge that had been abandoned seemed to him the most soothing place to take it.

The professor was really in too shaky a condition to enjoy sitting upon a slab of concrete with back leaning against an angle of masonry looking out across a narrow strait which somebody whom he did not know had attempted to bridge. So Westerman and Bir Jung lazed away the afternoon and smoked and talked and built hypothetical bridges—at least Westerman did—of a dozen different designs; and he showed the patient Bir Jung exactly how they were to be built, too. Altogether a most enjoyable spending of a well-earned rest.

With the coming of dusk and suppertime Westerman arose, a giant refreshed with wine, and stretched his shoulders luxuriously.

"Let's go and hold up the commissioner and get our passes," he said.

And he did, and got them.

FOUR days later saw them in Calcutta once more; and an hour later saw them in the old temple of Durga by the Nimak Ghat. The disciple at the gate rose from his bed of nails with alacrity at their appearance.

"The holy one is expecting the chosen ones," he said enigmatically and led the way to the inner vault.

The old *yogi* was sitting in exactly the same position as they had left them. The staff and the tongs lay to the fraction of an inch in the same place. The hands rested as if paralyzed into immobility. The necklet of beads hung as if it had been glued in place; the knot was five beads from the bottom. The very lock of matted hair that drooped over his face was there.

In those mystic surroundings it was quite easy to believe that he had never moved from his platform. He was even making the same magic with the voices that spoke out of the darkness above. But this time even Bir Jung had the temerity to laugh.

The baleful eye glowered at them as before with even greater hostility if possible; and his opening speech certainly savored of the blackest magic.

"Show me the keys, the three that ye bear and prove that what has been told to me is true."

The suspicion of some inconceivably clever espionage was inevitable. And yet how could it be? Who could have got ahead of them and told the old wizard anything? It was impossible. Westerman growled as much.

"Ho-ho-ho-ho!" the old sorcerer chuckled. "The *sahib* who is so clever does not believe? Listen then. It has come to me that much slaughter has been. It has come that the three who were the keepers of the keys have gone to their appointed place. It has come that the *sahib* is now the keeper in place of those who are not.

"How do I know? Ho-ho! Perchance my messengers who spoke with me even now told me. Perchance that one whom this hill man ripped apart as a waterskin is ripped came himself and told me. Perchance my eye that is closed to outer things saw and told me.

"How do I know? Many roads of knowledge are open to me. No matter. It has come to me that the three who were the keepers have been judged unworthy, and that three others have been chosen in their place. The cause and the reason are beyond my knowledge; the thing having been determined in the councils of the gods. The fact is contrary to the desire of my heart; but who am I to question the inscrutable will of the gods?

"Show me the keys, ye chosen keepers. The three keys as a proof; and by the law and the symbol and the oath must I then deliver that of which *I* am the keeper."

The old wizard with his cryptic jargon was uncanny. What could it all mean? How could he know? Bir Jung muttered an invocation to his own friendly godlings and touched his amulet. But Westerman had no time for conjecture. Bluntly he unrolled his little package and placed his three daggers in the old man's eager hands.

It was like placing a sacrament into the hands of a devotee. The *yogi* held them for a moment clasped against the three horizontal stripes across his chest. Carried them then to the stripes across his forehead, and remained with bowed head in apparent invocation. Then with a reverent nicety of position he thrust them upright, one beside the other, in the clay floor before him, rocking his body to and fro and chanting the name and titles of each as he had done on the previous occasion. When he came to the third dagger his devotion sublimated into an ecstasy.

"Siva, the Destroyer!" he chanted. "Bhairava, Terrible One! Lord of Soma! Ishta Devatta, the Very Lord! Sveta, White One! It is the key! The very key! The words are the words of Siva the Lord! The Eight-Handed Slayer!

"When the appointed command is spoken
Then shall all be purified with fire."

It was the innocent couplet spoken by relatives about to apply the flame to the pyres of their dead. Westerman could not help admiring the carefully planned ingenuity of the whole intricate scheme. Singly the daggers were just harmless curios bearing rimes as innocuous as a Christmas card. Together they conveyed a message to those who had ears to hear of a plot slowly progressing to its climax of conflagration.

Woven in with the thread of the message was the yarn of symbolism which plays so large a part in all Indian life. The daggers were three. Singly they had no power. United they formed a key to the power of much gold. Three indispensable parts of a perfect whole. Symbolical of the unity of the three gods they represented. Tangled up thence in some mystical fashion with the power of the gods to compel some obedience or other.

After which the thing delved too deep into the mysteries of profound Hinduism for Westerman to follow. A very maze of tortuous Oriental ingenuity.

The monotonous invocation was droning to a finish.

"Now are the keys made whole. The Three that were three in separation are one in Unity. The symbol of the One. The infinite Om. The Perfected Power. The Command that must be obeyed."

The voice was cracked with anguish. To obey seemed to rend his aged soul in twain; yet there seemed to be no thought of disobedience. He remained bowed over the three potent symbols, which glowed and crawled and winked as if they understood.

Just what the mystic command might be or why it should be so compelling Westerman was utterly unable to gather out of all this cabalistic jumble. It was sufficient for him that the old *yogi* apparently considered himself bound by some obscure power to deliver up the trust fund to the holders of the three united symbols.

Westerman knew that he was trembling with excitement, and for the first time in his life he admitted it. The extraordinary tale of blood and of men's lives brought to him in far-away New York had led, the gods only could have foretold whither, had waded through a sea of blood and men's lives again and had arrived at last at an enthralling climax. The wild yarn of treasure at the end of the trail, which he had never very much believed in, was apparently true. The hoard of a king was about to be delivered into his hands. His voice was unsteady as he demanded his right.

"The Command must be obeyed. Where then, O Soma, is the trust of which you are the keeper?"

The *yogi* raised his head. He had suddenly become a decrepit and a weary old man.

"It is not here, O Chosen Holder of the Keys. It is in a safe place three days' journey from this. One day is to be traveled in the *terain*, the rest by ox-cart. The name of the place which is a station of the *terain* is Muttiagunge. Let the *sahib* make the arrangements. I am an old man."

The climax had been only a minor one after all. The tale, as if it hated to be finished, had yet a page of its dramatic course to run. Westerman was as eager to finish the book as were the others. He took tickets for four to the place called Muttiagunge and profited by his recently acquired knowledge of some of the customs of the country to telegraph the stationmaster to procure an ox-cart, a large one capable of carrying much treasure, for his party.

Travel by ox-cart over Indian roads is not an exhilarating performance. In the case of this tale, woven by the gods, the journey had been inserted clearly as the necessary interval of suspense.

The slowest beast known to man is the aptly named sloth. Only one degree is the cart-buffalo removed from him.

The stationmaster, in accordance with the instructions about a large and roomy cart, had procured a pair of buffaloes. A buffalo cart plows inertly through interminable furrows made by previous carts, relieved only by the tree roots that have not worn so deep as the soft mud. Over these it heaves up and up on one side till it seems that it must surely overturn.

But a buffalo cart never overturns. Cartmen claim with pride that wherever a horse can go a cart can follow. Instead of overturning when it reaches the pinnacle of balance it crashes down on the other side of the root and jars one's vertebræ all the way up to the neck.

When one does these things for two days one is convinced that the suspense will never end. Yet a bullock cart journey is no different from all the other things that must come to an end some time. This one came to its end only one day later than the stipulated time, which, since the cripples who crawled from the cart had counted it in minutes, had been a tortured age.

Old Soma was anxious to hurry to the safe place and get his unpleasant duty over as soon as possible; for natives are inured to bullock-cart travel. But the others, in spite of their fever heat of accumulated impatience, decided to postpone the formality of taking over the vast wealth till the following day.

Bir Jung was no more tired than Soma; yet he agreed whole-heartedly to the delay. His was an eternal suspicion of all men who dwelt in the plains.

"If we be followed," he explained, "they will think to come upon us in the night after we have taken the treasure. Approaching thus, they will come upon me, watching half a league down the road, and will follow no more."

BUT nobody followed. When the others awoke from their stiff sleep on the ground under the cart Bir Jung was merrily sharpening the already razor edge of his kookerie.

"Where treasure is, war may be," he explained wisely.

But the old *yogi* was evidently sincere in his desire to fulfill the terms of the potent command laid upon him. The place he had taken them to was a wide plain, scrub-grown and dotted with *sal*-trees. Through this the furrows that marked the road led interminably away, the gods knew where.

To the right, snuggled against some low outcropping hillocks backed by a scummy green creek, were the ruins of one of those ancient cities which remain the archeological mystery of India. To this city the *yogi* led the way.

"Bring a lamp," was all that he vouchsafed to their eager inquiries.

Carved marbles vied with shattered pillars to block the way through moss-grown courts and tottering cloisters. The professor, instantly forgetful of hidden treasure, would have stayed to rhapsodize over the treasure in full view. But they dragged him with them, quarreling furiously; for fallen masonry in India is the chosen breeding-ground of cobras.

They were scrambling through what must have been the colonnades of a palace. Just the locale for a hidden treasure. Presently the *yogi* ducked down a flight of stone steps into a sort of sub-cellar or vault.

Westerman looked at Bir Jung to note whether the Gurkha showed any signs of what he himself was feeling. If it was any criterion, Westerman must have been on the supreme pinnacle of excitement. The Gurkha stepped stealthily, with head bent forward, alert, as if fearful of frightening the treasure away or of meeting with desperate resistance from guardian spirits. Only the professor was unmoved, grumbling about his marbles outside.

But the suspense was not concluded yet. Soma thrust a lean arm into a crevice and groped, an expression of anxiety on his own face. Presently he grunted an expression of satisfaction and drew from the hole a great brass key. As large as a spade the thing was, clumsy in design, yet finished with all the care of Oriental craftsmanship. The professor uttered a squeal of delight and hurled himself at it.

"That's mine!" he barked defiantly. "I've got to have that! You can take anything else you want; but this specimen is mine by the sacred right of all museums."

Old Soma peered bewildered from under his tangle of hair at the queer *sahib* who wrestled with him for possession.

"Tell him it is for the door to the safe place," he said meekly.

All his old arrogance was gone. He was no more than an old servitor of his gods, humbly carrying out their behests.

Again he led the way, out of the ruined streets this time to one of the low rocky mounds behind the city. There was no hesitation. He knew exactly where to go. Before a blank wall of débris he stopped.

"Let the young men tear down the bank," he said. "I am an old man."

Hard-rock miners would have commended the speed with which Westerman and Bir Jung scratched away the loose shale and dirt with their bare hands. Fortunately for the hands—for the men showed them no mercy—the covering was not extensive. Within two feet a slab of stone standing upright against the hill began to be laid bare. Bir Jung let out a hysterical laugh and pushed at it with hand and foot and shoulder.

"This is vain expenditure, foolish one," said Soma. "All must first be removed for the insertion of the keys."

With an exasperating insistence that was excruciating he made them remove every last speck of dirt till the whole slab was revealed. It was of a hard granite, carved in low relief with three uncouth figures of gods. The priest goaded them to the point of insanity while he performed a ceremony before the thing:

"Behold the Three who are One. The Perfection of Power."

He bent his head three times till the tangled hair trailed in the dust.

"The Three who, uniting as One, open the door to the treasure of perfected knowlege. Behold the door to the treasure. O Brahma, Creator of All Things, receive thy symbol of power from the servant of Shiv."

It became apparent that in the mouth of the grotesque figure with the two normal arms was a fine slit. Into this the *yogi* pushed the appropriate dagger. Something clicked on the inside.

"O Vishnu, Preserver of All Things, receive thy symbol of power from the servant of Shiv."

The four-armed grotesque received its third of the combination.

"O Siva, Bhairava! Thy command is laid upon thy servant. Bear witness that he fulfills."

The eight-armed murderer, recognizable also by his necklace of skulls and the sacrificial infant, bore witness with a metallic clink. Tense breaths were exhaled. There was not one of them who had not feared that the mechanism would fail to respond. With the heavy monotony of a verger the *yogi* outlined history as he poked with the great key at a gash in the rock.

"This door belongs not in this place. It was brought but recently from a private temple of the ancient palace by thrice three men under my command, speaking as the mouthpiece of the gods.

"They are all dead. How should I know how they died. I am an old man. Having honored them by service, the gods took them. Only I, the mouthpiece of the gods, remain and know this place.

"It is a holy place. In the old days when the ancient city was new the gods lived here while the temples were being built. Before the city was, men lived here while houses were being built. Before houses were, yet other men lived here while the gods were teaching them knowledge for the building of houses.

"How do I know? In my third and my fifth and my seventeenth incarnations was I here, even then the mouthpiece of the gods."

Even the professor, student of archeological lore, could have murdered the maundering old man. At last the ancient key was fitted; but the old priest's strength was unequal to the turning of it. Westerman pushed him aside and applied both hands to the great ring. The scraping of ponderous stone bolts could be heard from within.

Something jammed. Great Heaven! And no digging-tools! The professor was wildly excited at last.

"By Jimmy, this is wonderful! Unique! Pure Phœnician craft! I shall insist on Mr. Couradi buying this whole section from the Indian Government and removing it piece by piece. I——"

Westerman pushed the maniac aside and applied his strength to the lever. He released the strain and then twisted with a sudden jerk. The heavy bolts grated over with a succession of dull thuds, and the door moved.

"*Shabash, sahib!* Heave now with all your might."

Bir Jung hurled himself at the heavy door—and was precipitiated into the dark interior. The great slab had swung inward as easily as an apartment entrance.

A damp, musty breath drifted out of the darkness. In spite of all he knew about mine-shafts and poisonous air Westerman waited only long enough to light the lantern before he dashed in after Bir Jung, who had waited for nothing at all.

The passage sloped slightly and opened out within a few yards into a rocky cave, the regularity of which, as well as the chisel-marks on the walls, bore out the *yogi's* statement that it had at least been artificially enlarged. The floor was of a pure, loose, white sand—and on it, ranged along one wall, was a double row of baskets and sacks of obviously modern manufacture, blatantly incongruous in that ancient place!

Bir Jung gave a whoop and dived upon the nearest of them on all fours. Westerman followed more circumspectly with the lantern, yet with a vague misgiving. The sacks did not look right. They were not bulging with bullion as sacks of hidden treasure should. Bir Jung was discovering the same thing.

"*Kyé bhoyo?* What thing is this? They stand stiff, as empty shells; yet— *Atchtchyé*——"

With a low cry like a wounded monkey he leaped to the nearest basket. That, too, sat squat and settled down and showed pure sand where gold should have been. He seized it in his hands and gave a great heave to hoist it out of its bed in the sand into which the weight of treasure had sunk it—and fell back sprawling with his effort against expected resistance which was not there. The basket came away in his hands, a mere bottomless rim, not more than a few inches deep.

"*Wah toba!* By all the gods, the wizard has befooled us! Guard the door, *sahib.*"

But a glance at the old man's face was clear evidence that he was as mystified as they. He picked up a sack, bottomless like all the rest of them, and peered into it as if to read some psychometric explanation out of mere contact. Possibly some vague impression did communicate itself to him; for he turned it end for end and began to feel with sensitive fingers along the irregular lower edge, darker in color than the rest. His eye was blank, as if turned inward.

Westerman had faith in the professor's knowledge of reading the past from dead and moldering relics. He called to him to come and display some of his vaunted observation and deduction. But the professor was scuttling along the farther dim corner, careless of his treasure-hunting associates, chirruping and crooning to himself as he wallowed in an apparent charnel-house of bones. He shrieked his rage at the disturbing hand which dragged at his shoulder.

"Condemn your filthy jewelry!" he snarled. "What do I care about your empty gunny-sacks? Don't worry me! Look what I've found! Look at that head! Observe the parietal, gentlemen."

He was the professor on the lecture platform now.

"As elongate as the Neanderthal, though the frontal bones are even more depressed. Glabelle every bit as prominent as *Pithecanthropus Erectus.* That in itself, gentlemen, is sufficient to class this skull as *the* discovery of the age.

"*But*—ah, young men; let me call your attention to the surpassing value of this specimen. Those on the lowest shelf have moldered from the action of damp; but this —and I have no doubt that others on the upper shelves which I have not yet examined will show——"

Westerman had received an idea. He left the old man to rave about his bones and hurried back to the sacks. The *yogi* was still examining a lower edge, straining to receive his psychic impression. Westerman did the same; but by the light of the lantern and following a logical line of thought.

"Look here, Bir Jung!" he said with renewed excitement. "This thing is dry now; but look at the traces of mold. That's not torn. It's just plain rotted. Lying on the ground, the damp has eaten the bottoms out, and the heavy stuff has just sifted itself under the sand."

"*Khoda kerim!* It is verily so. By digging then——"

The rest of his sentence remained unfinished, as with flying hands he dug like a terrier, sending sand flying in showers between his legs. Westerman cupped his own long palms and scooped out what he could of the fine grains that ran through the chinks between his fingers as if through an hour-glass. For some minutes the only sounds were their own panting and the bird-like chuckles of the professor as he prospected along the ancient burial shelves in the wall toward the lower end of the cave.

Bir Jung was already half-buried in his hole, despite the fact that the stuff slipped from all sides almost as fast as he could throw it out. He gasped through a gritty throat.

"How deep, think you, *sahib,* could it have sunk in this accursed dust?"

Westerman was regarding his own efforts with a dubious frown. A sound of ventral chuckling precluded his answer.

"Ho-ho-ho-ho, a jest! The way of the gods becomes clear."

The wizard was squatting on his haunches, rolling his horrible eye from side to side at some vast joke which he alone could see. Rag-wrapped, emaciated, the light from the lantern threw the deep shadows between his bones into startling contrast like a very mummy, a thing of ill omen come out of the haunted past to jeer at them.

" A jest indeed! The jest of the gods! Having appointed white *sahibs* as the keepers of the keys, they have taken away that which the keys kept. A wonder to tell in the bazaars! Ho-ho-hawr-hawr-hrh-hrh-hrh——"

"Cease thy croaking, toad," Bir Jung growled. "An ill jest for thee if——"

A terrified scream from the professor interrupted him.

"Help! It's got me!"

THERE was a considerable dip to the corner of the cave where he had prowled, and little light reached it. Wild thoughts of a great snake of some kind were the first to flash into Westerman's mind.

"Your kookerie, Bir Jung!" he snapped; and, grabbing up the lantern he raced for the far end.

At first sight it looked as if something had bitten the struggling scientist off at the thighs. Only the upper part of his body was visible.

Westerman rushed forward—and then hurled himself back with all his force. In his experience with bridges and river sands he had felt that sucking at his feet before.

The lantern in his hand showed him the clean, familiar, innocent-looking sand which quivered ever so slightly to the professor's struggles. And the professor was already four inches deeper.

Westerman knew what to do. He threw off his coat and spread it over as large a surface as possible.

"Hold my legs, Bir Jung," he ordered calmly. "Cheer up, professor *sahib.* No danger if you don't lose your head. Here, get a good grip of my hand. So. Now lie down right in it, on your back. That's it. Now wiggle your legs loose while I heave."

It was, of course, the right and only course. In less than a minute Westerman drew the professor up alongside of himself on his coat.

"Heave away, Bir Jung. Coat and all."

In another few seconds all three of them stood in safety. Westerman was able to laugh.

"Those things are quite all right if you're not alone. The trouble with a quicksand is when there's nobody within call. Gosh, I've seen 'em swallow a horse before one could drop a small tree across and get a hold of him."

The professor was more indignant than frightened.

"Why?" he demanded. "Why should that condemned thing be there when all the rest of the cave is as dry as a bone?"

Westerman, the engineer, elucidated.

"Seepage. That's all. The formation here is a light shale which will pass even a heavy oil like a sieve. That corner is probably below the level of the creek that's not a hundred yards away. In the rainy seas—By gosh!"

A sudden horrible thought had come to him. He strode to the still chuckling *yogi* and, grasping his shoulder, shook the laugh out of him.

"Soma!" he demanded in a tense voice. "How high does that creek rise in the rainy season?"

Soma knew its history.

"Until but recently, *sahib*, it was as the *sahib* sees it now. But since the *sirkar* built the great irrigation dam at Dhannuggur four years ago it fills the *nullah* in the time of rain to the level of the plain."

Westerman took it very quietly. He understood now to the last little detail. He looked quizzically at his companions and tried to break the news gently.

"I'm afraid, my friends, that old Soma's gods have dealt us a kick in the face. This sand—you see how it is in that corner—well, when the creek rises it's *all* like that!"

Nothing but silence. He explained some more.

"Four seasons would rot the bottom out of a steel plate; and then the heavy stuff—gosh, there's no guessing. A sand bed like this may run a thousand feet deep and Pete alone knows how many miles square. And from the water level down, it's all one big quicksand! Come on out, fellers, there's no use thinking about it."

But Bir Jung's faith in his gods was not utterly destroyed yet.

"Perchance, *sahib*," he begged with plaintive insistence, "perchance some of it might have stuck somewhere."

Westerman shrugged and smiled a twisted little smile.

"Well, there's just a slim chance that some of the stuff close up against the wall may have lodged in some little projection or ledge."

It was sufficient for Bir Jung. With a renewed confidence in Yabosh and Co. he set to scratching away at the base of the cave wall. His enthusiasm inspired Westerman, and he joined him in the forlorn hunt. The professor left them to it and went away to croon over his burial shelves of the old cave men who had dwelt in that place during the time of Soma's third incarnation.

Bir Jung was the first to find something. A small silver ingot lodged in a crevice. Instead of the unbounded joy that might have been expected, he wailed aloud at the thought of how many of those same ingots must have been contained in the basket which had been at that spot. Yet it was encouragement.

All day they worked, heedless of the yammerings of the professor, who kept finding treasure after treasure in his graveyard. When they had combed every last ounce of that sand along the wall through their fingers they had a little heterogeneous collection of silver bars and jewelry and coins. A few thousand dollars at most, Westerman estimated; and he barked a short laugh.

Old Soma came and fixed his eye appraisingly on the heap. Then he squatted down and rocked his body to and fro as if performing his ceremonial chant. But instead of chanting he laughed sepulchrally and long while the others looked at him in dispirited silence. Then he got up and pronounced his complete satisfaction with the world.

"I am an old man—and I have seen the jest of the gods."

And he went out from that place to tell the tale to all the world.

Westerman shrugged again, and his smile was almost whimsical.

"The old buzzard is right," he said. "And the jest is on us. Come on out to the cart and let's rustle up something to eat."

The meal—for two of them—was a silent one. But the professor babbled ceaselessly of his "discovery." He was replete with contentment himself, and he wanted to be consoling.

"What does the treasure matter?" he declaimed.

Since he had found something really ancient to present to his sacred museums he was the lecturing professor clear through.

"Filthy lucre, gentlemen. Mere dross.

"Now consider our monumental discovery here. What was Neanderthal compared to it? What was Java? La Denise? Brux? Spy? Fragments, gentlemen. Nothing but chips. A brain pan; a femur; a tooth. Guesswork, my friends.

"But we! *We* have specimens here as complete as Galley Hill and as old as *Pithecanthropus* at the very least. *We* are in the unparalleled position of being able to measure—not compute, but actually measure—the very angle of prognathism and the by-zygomatic diameter. Earliest Pleistocene, I venture to state. The discovery of the epoch. And to us—to *me* shall belong the honor of——"

It went on for a very long time. And perhaps it did in some way bring solace. Or perhaps it was the effect of the food on stomachs that had been too long empty. At all events Westerman's wryly humorous expression and Bir Jung's dejected one gave place to a more cheerful outlook on the world, which after all was still the same good place to go about in "for to admire and for to see."

After dinner came smokes in the starlight—and the man must indeed be a misanthrope who can see nothing but misery when he is well fed and the night is cool and the stars wink out on the vast open places and the pipe is sweet. Even the professor was charmed into a mood which impelled him to croon a song to himself.

"Eocene, Miocene, Pleiocene," seemed to be the burden of it.

Westerman sat on the cart-edge and swung his heels. Bir Jung squatted with his back against the great solid wheel.

"How much, think you, we have saved, *sahib?*" he asked.

"Oh, I don't know," said Westerman, and his voice was careless. "Nothing much. Some three or four thousand dollars apiece."

"And what will the *sahib* do now with his share?"

It was the question of all youth that never grows up. But there was a certain wistful note in it.

Westerman grinned.

"What I'll do? That's easy. Li'l ol' Noo Yawk and one hi-yu time among the high spots till it's all blown."

The Gurkha grinned in his turn. That answer had renewed his faith in his own analysis of men.

"I will make a prophecy for the *sahib,*" he said. "One week the *sahib* will stay. Perhaps two. And then the gods who live in the open places will pluck at the *sahib's* very heart-strings, and his feet will take the trail again.

"And that trail will lead— Now mark me well, *sahib.* In January will be a new commissioner in the islands; and—this is a surety—the *sahib* will come out again and will take up a contract to build that bridge; for on that is his heart set more than on all other things."

Westerman remained a long time in brooding thought. Then he brought his fist down on the cart with a smash that jarred a priceless collection of bones into the dust.

"By golly, I guess you're right!" he shouted. "That's just what I did have in mind in a vague sort of way; and now you've fixed it."

"It was so swritten," said the Gurkha with quiet conviction. "And I, *sahib.* When the steamer comes bringing the *sahib* out, I shall be waiting in the place where the plank is set."

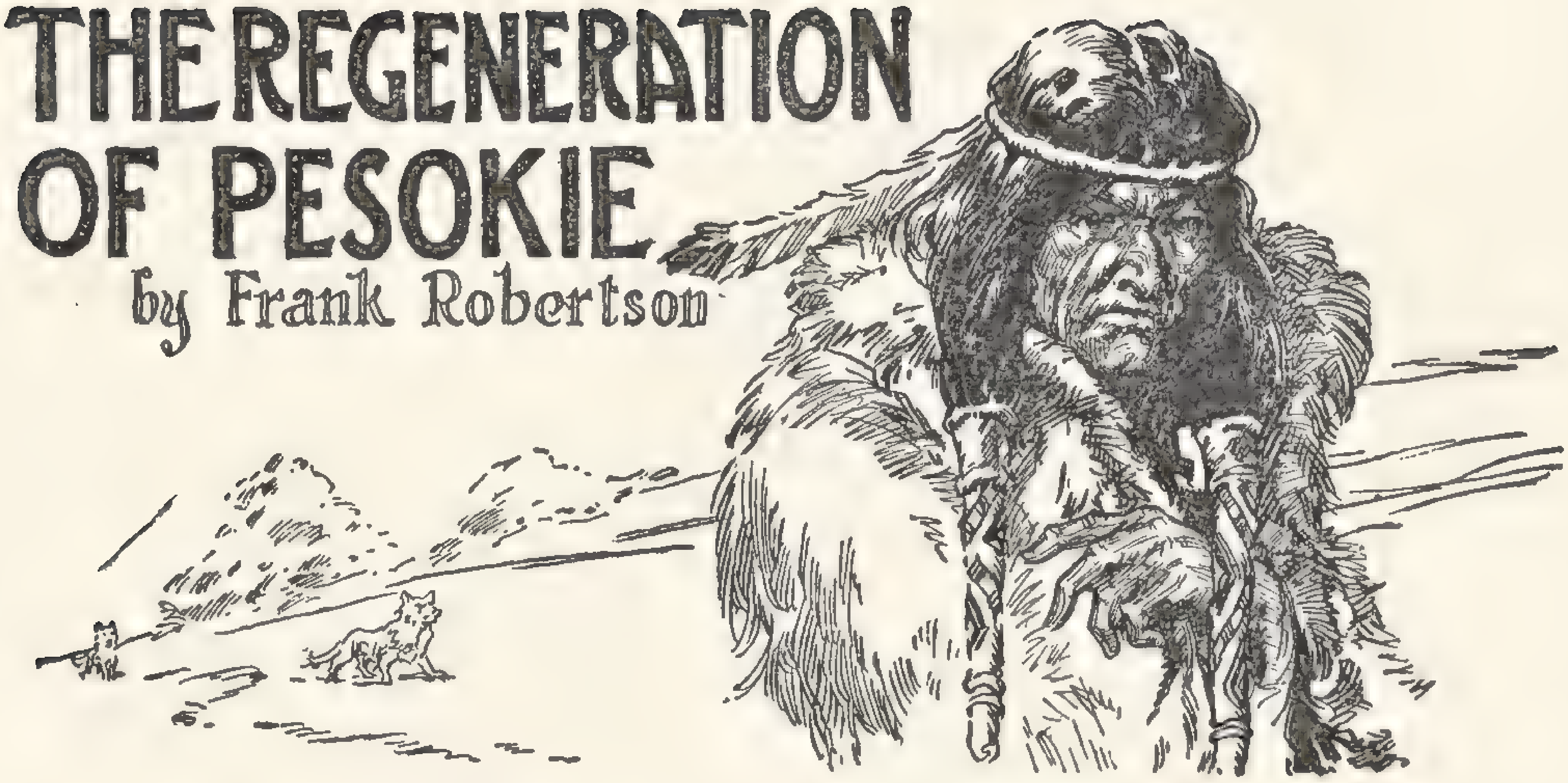
"You? But good Lord, Bir Jung, with your share of that money you'll be a wealthy man in your country. You can buy yourself cattle and land and wives, and settle down."

"*Sahib,*" said Bir Jung with a vast sententiousness, "when I shall be sixty years of age I shall buy me cattle and wives, and then—perchance—I shall settle down. Till then I am as the *sahib* is, a seeker after the gods who live in the far places of the earth."

"Hm-m. The gods who live in the far places," murmured Westerman. "The Red Gods. Some people call them 'Adventure.' Friend Jung, I guess we'll seek those gods together."

THE REGENERATION OF PESOKIE

by Frank Robertson



Author of "Not Three of a Kind," "Sportin' Blood," etc.

PESOKIE wrapped his evil smelling, moth-eaten, rabbitskin robe closer around him and buried his face deeper in its evil-smelling folds in an effort to conceal it from the circle of grim, contemptuous faces that ringed the inside of the ragged, smoke-blackened teepee. He stood in the center of that circle, did Pesokie, and any way he turned he could see only stern, baleful eyes glittering with bitter hate.

They were lean, gaunt men, those Indian warriors before whom Pesokie was on trial, with the excessively bright eyes and hollow cheeks of men who have gone long on starvation rations. Pesokie had known them all from infancy. One of them—who seemed the most implacable of the lot—was his elder brother, Sonnup. But once, for a period of five years, Pesokie had abandoned the tribe to follow a band of white trappers, and among them he had learned many things that were not good.

The only reason Pesokie had come back to his tribe was because he had been drummed from the camps of the white men because he was a thief. He had been welcomed back warmly, but his popularity had quickly waned. There was no iron in his spirit.

Then the tribe had fallen upon evil days. In the first place old Tobitsi's band was small, and it was poverty stricken. By some of the few white men who saw them they were known as "Rootdiggers" but this name was erroneous. Another name given them by some of the early American explorers was much more appropriate. That was "Poor-devil Injuns." In reality old Tobitsi's band was a branch of the great Shoshonean family of Indians.

In his youth Tobitsi and a few friends had rebelled against the chiefs of the western branch of the Shoshone tribe and as a consequence the band was outlawed from all the best hunting grounds. Fish, camas roots and jack-rabbits were the chief means of subsistence of the band. But in 1840 an Indian was an Injun to the few white men in the great land known vaguely as "the Oregon country," and that was all.

Early in the Spring the band had left the Winter village in a sheltered gulch in the Seven Devil Mountains, a couple of miles from the roaring Snake River, and began the usual Summer rambling. Wise in the lore of poverty, old Tobitsi always saw to it that when the supply of game, fish, or berries exceeded the immediate demand it was dried and a cache made in a place where none but an Indian would ever think to look. Just how wise he was was amply demonstrated by the disasters which afflicted the band the following Fall.

The band had wandered far to the southward, and just when old Tobitsi was about to order the return journey the village was raided by their old enemy, the Bannacks, who destroyed such supplies as they had; and worse than all stole the few miserable

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"The Regeneration of Pesokie," copyright, 1923, by Frank Robertson.

cayuses the band had been able to get together through the painstaking efforts of old Tobitsi.

In a desperate but futile effort to save the few scanty belongings of the tribe old Tobitsi had been killed, and the remainder of the band had fled still farther from the Winter quarters to avoid the blood-thirsty Bannacks.

Then Winter had struck a full month early, and the band, horseless, weaponless, leaderless, homeless, faced starvation. Only one hope remained—that they might get back to the sheltered gulch in the Seven Devils. There, though the snow was sure to be deep, there were no marrow-freezing blizzards, and it was possible to catch salmon through the ice of Snake River.

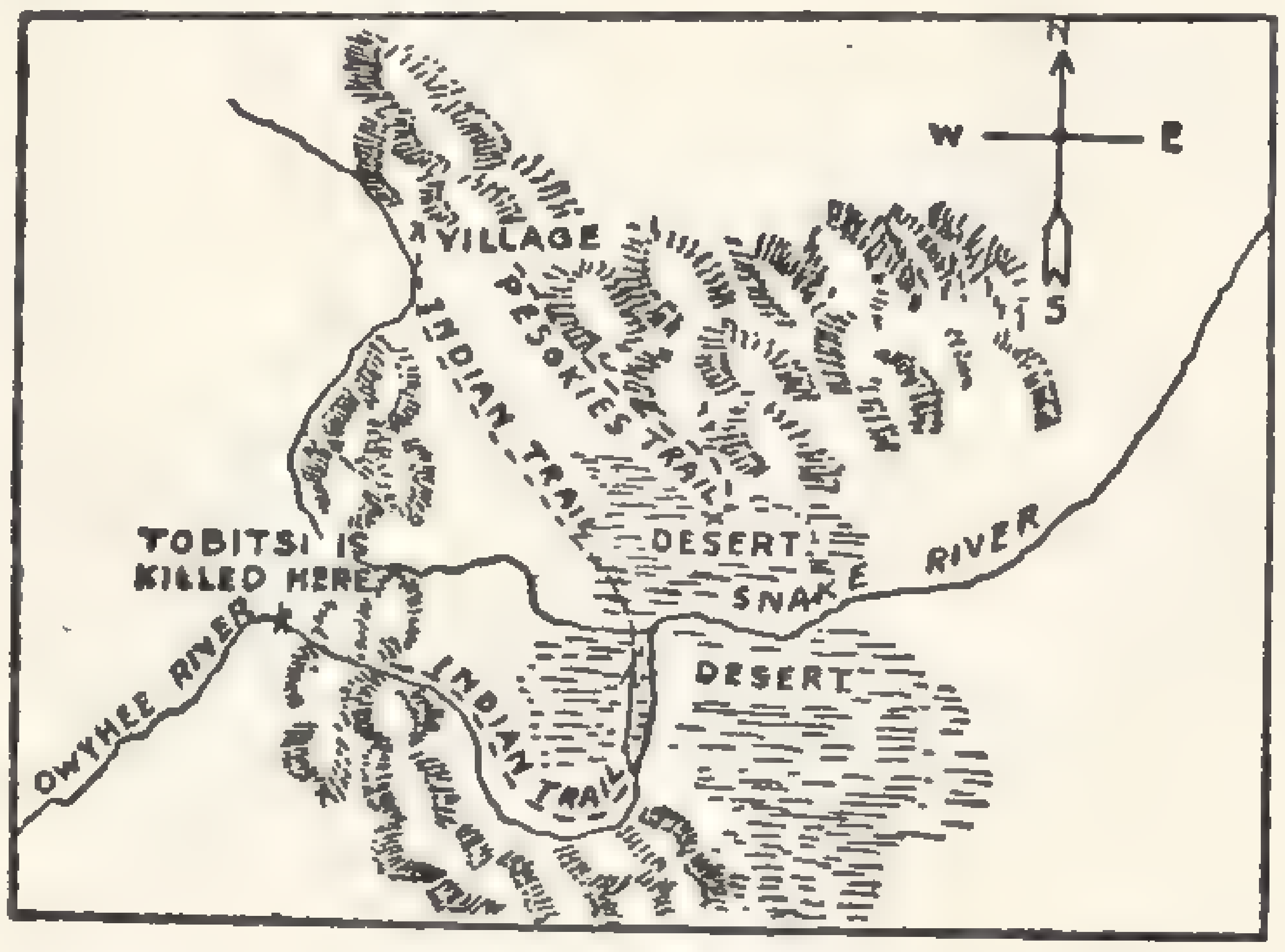
For the first time the tribe really appreciated the wisdom of old Tobitsi as they thought of those caches of food back along the long, bitter trail. With luck, fortitude, and extreme care there would be food enough in the caches to enable them to get back.

In only one thing was the band rich—or poor—depending upon the point of view. For every Indian in the tribe there was at least two dogs—mangy, worthless curs who just managed to catch enough rabbits to keep life within their miserable carcasses. They were a lean, half-savage breed; a mixture of dog, wolf, and coyote. They tolerated their Indian masters just as their masters tolerated them. Any time an Indian wished to lose a finger or two he had only to attempt to pet his dog.

At the time of Tobitsi's death the band was camped in the wild, rocky defiles of the Owyhee River. When Winter overtook them they were in the mountains to the south and west. They knew that bands of Bannacks and Shoshones wintered at the mouth of the Owyhee and along some of the bars under the bluffs of the mighty Snake. In something that approximated panic the forlorn band skirted the foot-hills until they reached a place where they felt it might be safe to make a dash across the great Snake River Desert to their Winter home in the Seven Devils.

The desert did not bother them now; it was covered with a blanket of snow that soaked their moccasins, and it stormed continuously on their mad dash to the river; first rain, then sleet, then snow, then each evening a bitter moaning wind arose that froze their miserable rabbitskin clothing into soggy sheets of ice.

None but Indians could make it, but at last they reached the river. The mighty Snake coursed on, unmindful of the fate of a band of miserable Indians. There was no ice to cross on as yet; they had no horses to swim it, and worse—up-river they could see the smoke from an Indian village. While the band lay hidden in fireless discomfort under the bluff, Sonnup ventured up-stream on a scouting sortie.



Six hours later he returned with the unwelcome news that the village above was hostile Bannacks. But he had managed to steal a canoe from the enemy to effect a crossing. It required many trips, taking several precious hours to get the band across the river, but at last it was accomplished. As the canoe bearing the last of the Indians pushed off from the bank the snarling horde of dogs plunged in after it.

The Indians knew that the theft of the canoe would not go long undiscovered, therefore they sank it and hurried into the desert again, bearing steadily northward. It was still fifty miles to the nearest of Tobitsi's caches, and already the papooses were whimpering from hunger. Ten of the strongest bucks went on ahead to bring back dried fish and service berries from the cache. Among these was Pesokie.

NIGHT came on the bucks quickly, but still they plodded on; and now the snow grew deeper and deeper. Only one lean-flanked buck seemed to lag. That was Pesokie. The rest looked at each other and smiled. He was not less husky than the best of them, but his medicine was weak. It had never been strong. When the other bucks spoke of battles and of chanting their death songs Pesokie always sat and shivered. His association with the white men had further weakened his moral fiber. Before midnight they had lost him altogether.

At last the bucks stopped to rest until morning. The sage around them was five feet high and at the butt often as thick as a man's thigh. Yet the roots were rotten and it was not hard to break down enough to build a roaring fire, which was started by the fire-rope carried by one of their number. This rope, tightly woven from inside bark fibers, would smolder from the end for many days. It required but a few hard breaths to fan it into flame. No matter what happened, the band always preserved at least one fire-rope.

The glow from the fire should have guided Pesokie, but he did not arrive. The other bucks did not worry—the squaws and papooses, and weak old men behind occupied their thoughts. If one strong warrior could not make his way through alone, let him perish, was their thought.

At daybreak they went on, and about midafternoon they reached the cache. Amazement filled their eyes. It had been broken into, and the carefully obliterated tracks in the snow showed that it had been done that very morning. Not all of the scanty food supply, however, had been taken. Only so much, in fact, as one man with an enormous appetite might have eaten.

A swift council was held, and it was decided that some wandering Indian must have blundered on to the cache and gone on. There was no time for pursuit, so the braves helped themselves and with renewed strength started back to meet the remainder of the band each with a light pack of food on his back. They missed Pesokie on the return trip, but they saw by the tracks in the snow where he had wandered aimlessly from the trail.

In due time all of the band reached the cache, and there they found Pesokie. He had wandered far from the trail, but after great privation—so he told them—he had found the cache. Those bucks who knew how much food had been left in the cache when they returned to meet the remainder of the tribe, frowned. Pesokie, evidently, had a large stomach and a clamorous one for a man staggering with weakness.

They could only rest a few hours at the cache; then plod on. But the food was gone already, and the next cache miles ahead. Again the squaws whimpered and the papooses wept, but still the plucky little band moved on—all but Pesokie. He was sick. He implored the band to go on and leave him. He was a warrior—he would face death as befitted one. But he craved a fire, and they gave him a fire-rope; also a bow and some arrows tipped with flint, and he had his hunting knife.

At last the weakened, starving band reached the next cache, and to their horror and despair it, too, had been broken into. This time the marauder had not only taken what he could eat or carry away; he had wantonly destroyed the rest. And as before his tracks were covered so skillfully that none might follow. In grim desperation the band plowed slowly on through the snow toward the next cache. They no longer attempted to keep together. When the strongest staggered up to the place of the cache it, too, had been despoiled. In despair they sat down and waited for the remainder of the band to arrive.

There was no game left on the desert. Off to the west many miles was the mighty, thunderous Snake, which made there a tremendous bend before looping back to the north again on its wild way to the Pacific. To deviate from the straight trail to the Seven Devils meant certain death.

It now seemed certain that the marauder ahead knew of their caches. Being well fed, he could never, it was certain, be overtaken by the weak, starving braves of the tribe.

At last the band was gathered together again. Even the weakest had managed to stagger in; but, finding no food here, even the strongest were ready to give themselves up to starvation. If ever there was needed a man upon whom should fall the mantle of Tobitsi it was now. And as the band huddled together helplessly such a man spoke. It was Sonnup, the brother of Pesokie.

"We must go on to the land of the Seven Devils," he said. "There will we find food, and also the thief and the cache-robber. When we find him his name will be Pesokie."

Eyes, abnormally bright with the fire of starvation were turned upon him with listless inquiry.

"Pesokie was strong. Always he stayed behind while the rest sought for food, and at the kettles he was more valiant than any.

Is it reasonable that he could not keep up with the weakest papoose when we left the Snake? What he did was this: He dropped behind, and while the rest slept he went on to the cache, fed and sneaked back. When the braves visited that same cache, secured food and started back Pesokie came again—pretending it was the first time. When we arrived he claimed to be sick. We left him again but with weapons and a fire-rope.

"Strong and well-fed, he passed us in the night, and now, still strong and well-fed, he goes ahead and robs the caches. He knows we will all die and when he reaches the place of the Winter village he will live well and in safety."

The listlessness dropped from the starving braves, and they leaped to their feet, seizing their rude weapons fiercely.

"We will catch the thief," Sonnup continued with quiet dignity. "If we do not then I will submit to the torture—for I am his brother. If we do catch him then it shall be I who names the punishment."

"How then will my son catch the thief and save this people?" demanded a gray-headed warrior.

"Listen," said Sonnup.

They lent ear, and dimly from the east they heard the shrill, wavering pack-cry of the village dogs as they roamed widely in search of rabbits. Slowly understanding crept from face to face.

"For days the dogs have not come near us, but yet they follow closely. I can call them in. When they are among us let every one kill what he can, for we may not get near them again. Even lean dog in the kettles will be stronger than the dried roots and berries in the caches. With food in our bellies the strong men can go on to the Seven Devils without more. The weak can follow till we send food back."

Hope sprang into the famished faces, and crude weapons were made ready. The dog call was sent out, and at dark the wolfish looking pack came slinking in, their beady eyes glinting as hungrily as those of their masters. At a word from Sonnup the attack began. It was quickly over as the startled pack fled from the village, but a dozen dead dogs remained.

With strength renewed by the unsavory stew the band went on in the morning, a dozen braves leaning out ahead, spurred on by thoughts of vengeance. And the dogs, slaves as they were to habit, kept close to the leaders of the band, and occasionally some luckless one among them fell a victim to Indian strategy.

At last the dozen strong bucks reached the top of a ridge which overlooked the gulch where the tribe was wont to winter. The snow was now two feet deep, and the roar of the river was muffled by the ice that choked the channel from bluff to bluff.

A snarl came from each stringy throat as they saw a thin wisp of smoke rising above a sheltered grove of trees. Throwing themselves flat on their faces they began to crawl forward; their dingy, white rabbit-skin covering blending with the snow. They reached the grove at last, and there, in the shelter of a triangular hut of brush, before a cheerful fire, sat Pesokie gnawing a thick side of salmon. The narrow entrance of the hut was blocked with grim, merciless warriors before Pesokie sensed their coming.

He looked at them once quickly, dropped his eyes, threw the uneaten side of salmon away, and slowly pulled his robe up over his head.

* * *

NOT until the last member of the band had arrived was Pesokie liberated from the floor of the hut where he had been spread-eagled for days. Stiff and sore, he staggered to his feet to face the grim circle of his accusers.

There was no mercy in any of those harsh faces surrounding him. Outside were the squaws and papooses, hoping that the thief would be tortured and that they might have a hand in it. Among them, no longer starving and fearful, was the remainder of the tribal dogs.

For a moment Pesokie's fear-smitten eyes sought the streak of daylight that marked the door of the hut. His eyes fell upon the dogs, and enlightenment flooded his mind as he realized bitterly that it was the dogs which had enabled the tribe to get through. And the worst of it was he could so easily have avoided it. The dogs knew his voice, for he had found more friendship among them than among his people, and they would have followed him away from the village. But he had foolishly overlooked it in his plan, and now, as he faced the grim circle, he knew that he must pay.

"The man who would betray his own people to their death that his own belly may be full must die," suddenly declared Sonnup.

He strode to the center of the teepee and stood facing his brother. One hand caressed the handle of the hunting-knife at his thigh, until the knuckles turned bloodless. He turned slowly and gazed into each stolid, cruel face in turn.

"How?" he boomed.

"By the torture," came from a dozen throats at once, and the cry was echoed from the outside.

"If the thief was caught, it was I who was to name the manner of his execution—it is I who have suffered corruption of the blood of my ancestors," Sonnup said gravely. "It is I who will name the penalty."

He raised the knife savagely, and of a sudden Pesokie cast aside the dingy robe and faced his brother with bared breast. But the knife did not fall. A chorus of savage protest stayed the hand of the avenger.

"Fire, fire!" screamed the entire band.

Involuntarily Pesokie cringed. Facing a quick death by a knife was one thing, by a slow fire was another. And at heart Pesokie was a coward.

Sonnup bowed his head.

"It is true," he said, "that his fate should equal the one he would have given us. He would have left us to freeze and starve. The same fate shall be his. We will drive him forth from the village without food, without fire, and without weapons. For a time he will wander as we wandered. Then he will perish miserably as he would have had us perish."

The circle visibly hesitated. Nothing was so dear to them at the moment as prolonged torture of the craven who feared not only death but hardship. Yet they could see a sardonic justice in the proposed punishment. They could imagine all sorts of suffering which the fugitive would have to undergo—intensified a hundred times by his abject fear—and it would be lengthened to an indefinite extent, since they could imagine him wandering for days amid the grim horrors of starvation and cold.

"It is well," spoke up the oldest warrior in the council. "The penalty should be named by my son, Sonnup."

The other braves nodded their heads in grave assent.

Sonnup turned upon his brother, his deep, black eyes blazing. For a full minute he searched the face of the weakling, but Pesokie could not look up. Sonnup extended his hand toward the entrance.

"Go!" he said dramatically.

With his robe drawn over his face Pesokie went—out of the teepee into a furious mob of squaws and papooses. His robe was torn from his shoulders; long finger-nails tore at his skin until the blood ran in streams. With a scream of fear and agony Pesokie ran, naked except for his moccasins, into the snow, followed by the taunts and curses of the squaws until he topped a ridge and disappeared from sight. The last the tribe saw of him he was laboring heavily through snow that was thigh deep.

Once out of sight of the village Pesokie found a huge pine tree, overhanging branches of which had kept bare a bit of ground for a space of six feet in every direction. Here he stopped until he recovered his breath. Almost instantly the cold began to grip him. The short day was passing rapidly and night would intensify the agony. He began a long, weary circuit of the tree, around and around, stamping his feet and beating his arms. This, he quickly found, was not enough. Seizing great handfuls of the soft snow, he massaged himself with it earnestly, thus taking the frost from his tingling skin almost as fast as it entered.

He knew, did Pesokie, that but one chance remained to him to avoid death, and that was slim indeed; but, slim as it was, he must wait for it until morning. Then, if it did not materialize, there remained nothing to do except go out into the snow and walk, walk, walk until out of sheer weariness he must drop. Then—soon—would come sleep. It was the best death he could choose.

Darkness came quickly. Once Pesokie ventured back to the top of the ridge for a look at the village. Fires blinked and glowed cheerily. He could even see the papooses playing in the fire-light and eating huge chunks of salmon which they snatched from the kettles. He found himself fearfully hungry, for while in captivity he had not been well fed.

Yet his hunger was as nothing to the remorse that gnawed at him. A wind, thin and insinuating, crept down from the north and clutched at his unprotected hide. Tough and leathery though it was, his skin seemed to frizzle up like a piece of fat meat over a hot fire. He returned hastily to his tree for protection from the wind and rubbed snow upon himself with redoubled energy.

Once he heard the long, drawn-out hunger cry of a timber wolf, and he cowered in abject terror. Then the remaining dogs of the village took up the challenge, and for a time he knew that he was safe from this menace at least.

FOR hours nothing happened. Then suddenly Pesokie froze in his tracks like a startled rabbit. Something was coming along the trail he had made from the village. He did not see it nor hear it—yet he knew. It might be the thing he had waited for, the thing he had imagined once he had read in his brother's eyes, or it might be death coming in the form of unnamable terrors.

"Pesokie!" came a voice, low pitched but clear.

"Here, Sonnup, here!" the cache-robber cried eagerly.

A moment later Sonnup reached the place where Pesokie kept his vigil.

"Sonnup, my brother!" Pesokie cried in a trembling voice. Had he not been an Indian he might have sobbed, for he was a weakling and a coward. "I waited for you to come."

"You should die—thief—coward," Sonnup rasped in his deep, guttural tones vibrant with contempt.

With a swift movement of his arm he extended a hunting-knife. Then he shifted his shoulders and loosened an extra rabbit-skin robe.

"Take these," he said, "and go."

Pesokie seized them eagerly, with a gasp of thankfulness.

"You know the Bannack village we passed on the Snake," Sonnup said coldly. "Even a Bannack will feed a starving stranger. I have brought you the dogs. There is no game that you may get, but with the knife you may kill enough dogs that you will live. A coward is often resourceful."

"A bow and some arrows," Pesokie whined. "With those I can kill easily. With only a knife it will be hard."

Through the darkness the desperate Indian saw his brother's strong, white teeth gleaming in a grin. He shuddered.

"The other dogs, too, must have their chance," Sonnup declared in a voice cold as the north wind that whipped Pesokie's robe around his legs. A moment later Sonnup was gone.

Pesokie lingered no longer. He knew the mongrel dogs were close, and he called softly to them and plunged into the snow.

FOUR days later Pesokie still plodded in snow up to his knees. His flanks were gaunt, and his eyes glittered with the unnatural brightness of starvation. On every side was snow, snow, snow. Cropping out above it were the gray heads of monstrous sage-bushes which, bending in the breeze, seemed to nod solemn affirmation to the Indian that his end was near. A hundred yards behind the Indian a score of starving dogs skulked, their beady eyes not once leaving the man who staggered on ahead.

Snow had covered the great, flat desert to an unprecedented depth. Days before the black-tailed rabbits that infested it in Summer had migrated to the higher hills where they could browse upon the tender bark of bushes and trees. On all the floor of the desert there was no life save one Indian and a score of mangy dogs. Two days before the dogs had given up ranging for rabbits that were not there, and had taken to following the man; partly because it was their nature to follow man—and partly for something else.

Pesokie had often waited for the dogs to come near him, often burying himself in the snow. He coaxed and cajoled in vain. They laughed at him with lolling tongues and crafty eyes, but never came within reach of his knife.

He took to rushing them, but succeeded only in forcing them to keep at a greater distance from him. Once when a dog came a little nearer than usual Pesokie desperately threw his knife. With a shrill yelp the dog dodged the flying knife, and the knife itself was buried in the snow, traveling far through the snow after it had broken through the crust. It took Pesokie two frenzied hours to recover his weapon. He did not try that again.

The dogs' lips, as they followed the man, began to curl up wolfishly at the corners, but no more wolfishly than those of the Indian. Pesokie knew, as he tramped through the snow, that there remained but one chance. Starvation might at last force the dogs to lose their ingrained fear of man and attack him. If they did it would be in mass, and his one hope was that he might kill them all.

Each time he thought of this possibility Pesokie cringed. A cold that was not of the snow nor of the wind crept along his spine, for Pesokie was a coward. And he had no faith in his medicine.

Darkness fell, and Pesokie drew his robe close about him and burrowed into the snow. From sheer weariness he soon fell asleep, his hunting-knife clasped tightly in his right hand. He felt strangely rested when he awoke. A peculiar light far away on the eastern rim of the desert, that heralded the rising of the sun, cast dim shafts of silvery light on the snow, giving it a most uncanny hue.

The Indian struggled to his feet, finding as he did so, that his limbs were stiffened from the cold and were no longer sharply obedient to his will. His joints seemed to creak. His head seemed much too large for the rest of his body, and it was ringing with strange, unearthly noises.

He prepared to stagger on his way; then suddenly stopped and became petrified with horror. Ringing him around in a grim circle waited the starving, mongrel dogs. He shivered, but not from cold. All his life he had been a coward and a weakling, but it was a weakness of the spirit and not of the body. The moment he had dreaded so long had arrived. It meant his one chance for life, yet the clammy sweat of fear broke out upon him.

With slow, reluctant steps he advanced toward a dog, his knife poised for a downward thrust. The dog snarled and sprang back. The Indian stopped and looked back fearfully over his shoulder. The dogs behind him were ten feet closer than they had been. They, too, realized that the crucial moment was at hand.

Pesokie turned and sprang toward the nearest dog in sheer desperation, his knife making long, sweeping slashes through the air. All the dogs but one fell back. That one was the largest in the pack—a dog which was more than half wolf. It dropped under the sweeping knife, then sprang straight for the Indian's throat.

With a gasp of horror Pesokie threw up his left arm to protect his throat, shut his eyes and drove viciously but blindly downward with his knife. The wolf-dog was ripped open from end to end and dropped to the snow, but he had lived long enough to give the signal, and with one accord the horde leaped in.

Teeth sank into the Indian's leg just above the ankle on the tender shin-bone. The pain was agonizing. He kicked loose, but other dogs were seeking to mar his flesh. With a snarl that matched that of the hunger-crazed dogs he began to fight.

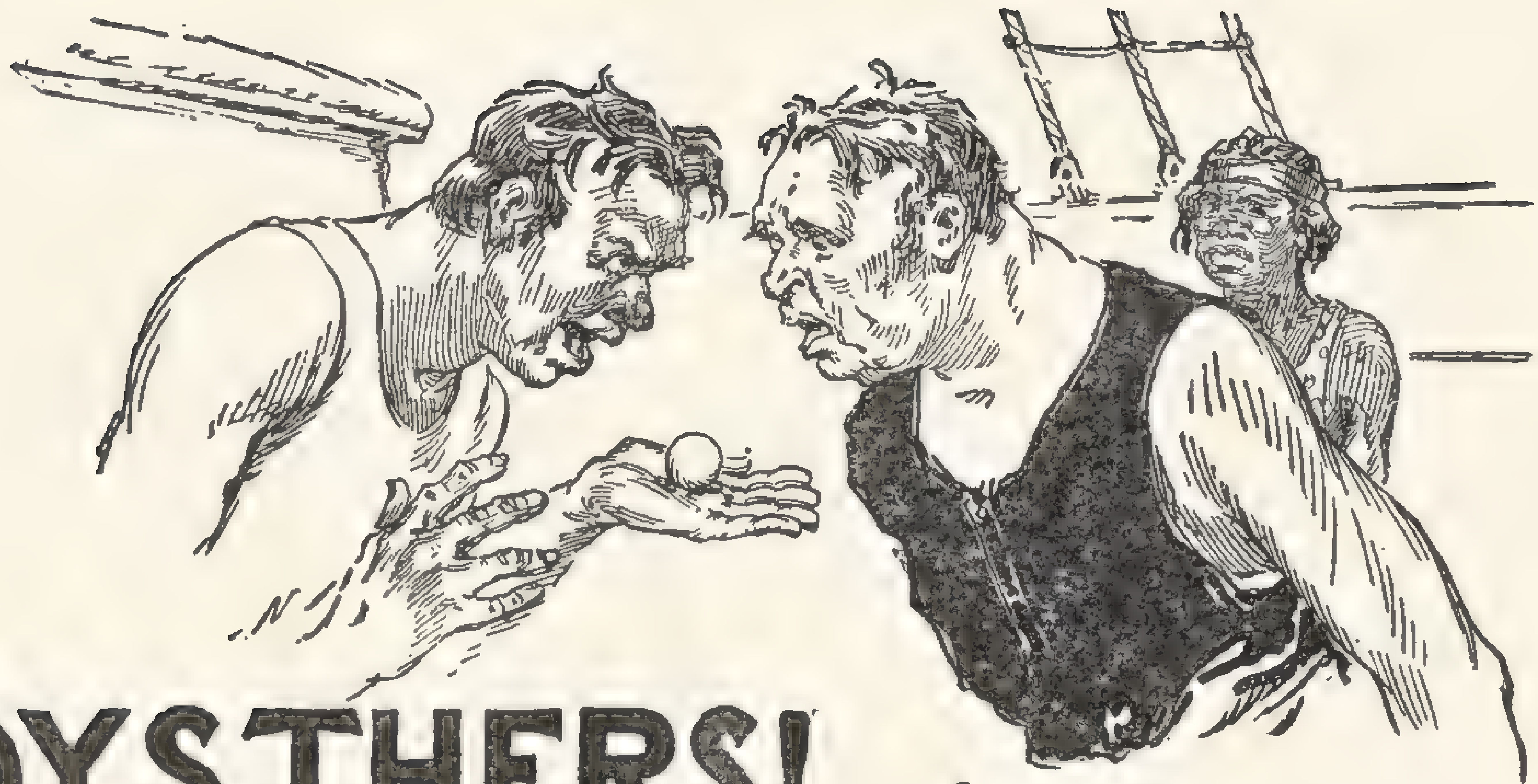
Almost instantly the rabbit-skin robe was torn from his shoulders and he stood there, a splendid figure of a man, with the silvery light of near-dawn gleaming on his bronzed skin. He lost track of the bites and tears from the maddened dogs. Strangely enough they ceased to pain greatly, for every time a brute set teeth to him some other dog fell before the deadly knife.

A wild exhilaration flowed over Pesokie. He had ceased to fear! He was fighting at last—the thing he had avoided all his craven life—and to his intense wonder he found joy in it, and an overwhelming satisfaction. His weak medicine had suddenly become strong.

One by one the famished, blood-maddened animals were cut down by that red, dripping knife, but the driving arm was surely but slowly losing its force. No longer could he rip open a dog from end to end. Frequently the knife stuck, and it required the strength of both arms to drag it out. For a moment, once, he had thought there was a chance; that he might annihilate the whole pack, feed upon their carcasses and escape. But his rapidly waning strength warned him it were futile to hope. To his own great amazement he did not care—greatly.

Suddenly he began to chant as he fought—his death song. There was no fear in it—no horror. Rather it was a song of victory, for Pesokie had realized at last that anticipation of suffering was much worse than the reality.

The silvery light in the east suddenly flared into a golden flood that was reflected back bravely in countless brilliant colors by the tiny frost particles on the crusted snow. In one spot on the great desert the rising sun beamed down upon a patch of snow in evil contrast with the rest—blood-sodden and trampled. There, among a score of tawny dead bodies, lay the outstretched figure of a naked, bronzed man. His body was covered with ragged, jagged wounds. In his right hand was a blood-stained hunting-knife. On his face the peaceful look of a brave man.



OYSTHERS!

by Gordon Young

Author of "Hurricane Williams' Vengeance," "One Chinese Night," etc.

PATRICK O'FLYNN DELANEY had red hair and his whiskers were red; but when I came to know him better I found that one eye was often blacker than the other. He was a sailorman, and had the immemorial gift of speech that the sea bestows upon her sons so that they tell tales of the strange things they have seen and done. His gift in this respect was blurred somewhat by a brogue that was thick as the San Francisco fog on the night we met across a table in the Harpoon Oyster House.

Our spoons had rattled in the emptied bowls at almost the same instant.

I said—

"Shall we have another?"

"Shure," said he. "An' we'll be afther tossin' up to see who pays for it."

I tossed a dime. He called heads, and heads it came.

"Lucky thing for you that Oi win, because Oi haven't the money to pay for two more bowls of oysther soup. An' shure as Oi 'm here, 't was less than six month ago that Oi was one of the richest men in the whole South Seas—f'r ten minutes, but no longer. Aye, wealth flies. Me an' Buck O'Malley, we were both rich as nabobs. 'T was oysthers as did it.

IT'S not necessary (he continued) to explain as how me an' Buck O'Malley come to be there on that little island of Rigoro, where was only a Dutch trader an' lots of naygurs; for that's a story of itself that Oi'll keep to meself till Oi know you better.

But Buck O'Malley he borrow'd the Dutchman's schooner widout asking for it. And though he had one of his own, he borrow'd the Dutchman's naygur wife the same way. Oh, Buck O'Malley had a way wid womin!

Him bein' no sailorman Oi went along to show him how to run the thing, 'r else he'd av gone an' drowned hisself, which Oi wish to Hivin he had done in his cradle. Yis, many 's the time Oi av wisht O'Malley ten fathoms deep in —— for ever bein' born. An' he 's there now, praise Hivin; for if it hadn't been him that went, 't would av been me. One of us had to go. An' it's always better for the worst man to go first, f'r don't he av to roast longer than a good one? Shure he do.

Well, we got to where we was goin', and O'Malley 'd propped hisself up agin the deckhouse, pipe in hand, an' watched for the oysthers the womin 'd bring up out of the lagoon.

Me—Oi couldn't endure the sight of such laziness in a full-growed man, so Oi 'd go sleep up in the bows till it was time to ate.

Both of them womin was in love wid O'Malley for his teeth was filled wid chips of the blarney stone. An' they work like Trojans, each a-thinkin' to get a little more of his love than th' other by pullin' up the oysthers. There was sharks big as th' divils ye can't see but are afraid of when you are knee-high to a grasshopper an' some old grandmother scares the stuffin' out of you wid witch-tales. But them sharks didn't trouble O'Malley f'r he couldn't swim.

Now Oi 'm a Christian, an Oi don't love naygur womin. They're too —— handy wid knives an' ugly in other ways.

An' when Oi wasn't sleepin' Oi cursed meself for bein' the fool to help a man steal a boat an' go off wid a pair of wives, neither of which was mine, thank Hivin.

Oi 'm afther telling you it was hot there in that eddy of —— wid nothin' to do but to wisht Oi hadn't done it; an' Oi told O'Malley he was more of a fool than meself for he expected to get rich.

Them oysthers was the biggest oysthers that ever growed on an oysther-tree down in the Divil's garden. Sometimes it 'ud take O'Malley and his two womin to lift one from the water afther it was brought up.

One of these womin he was callin' Kate, and the other were Betsy. And he always was a-tellin' of Kate on the quiet that she were his true love; an' bless you, but ever chanct he got he was a-tellin' of the same thing to Betsy. And a swearin' to each that he loved her dearer than his own soul, which were ondoubtedly true for he didn't care any more about his soul than Oi do for an empthy bottle of whisky.

Oi knew no good 'ud come of it and told him so, for it's bad luck to love one womin, an' O'Malley were busy wid two. He said they were sweet little things wid no harm in 'em.

"Childers of nathure," he called 'em.

Says Oi, "Look at their skins and ye can see who their father is. They've got coal-dust on 'em and smell of sulfur."

"That 's coconuts-oil," says he.

"But the coal-dust, O'Malley?"

"Kisses from the sun," says he.

"Oi like 'em the color that shows when they've took a bath," says Oi.

"An' don't you know," says he, "all womin look alike in the dark?"

"You 're a liar, O'Malley," says Oi.

"Oi wouldn't be gettin' on wid the ladies if Oi wasn't," says he.

"The heat in this blasted place makes me meditative," says Oi. "An' we been here six weeks a-ready, an' me reshpect for Eternithy is increasin' wid each day."

"The last bottle of whisky is gone, and it 's hard to kill time on an empthy stomick. That's what 's the matter wid ye," says Buck O'Malley.

And maybe it was.

We were moored in mongst a patch-work of reefs wid some palms an' bushes hanging for dear life to the rocks, an' the tide come in through the channel like the winds of —— a-wafting sinners south'ard. But them womin 'ud slip down, each wid a knife in her hand an' a net on her back, and sometimes Oi 'd watch 'em wid the water-glass, an' see one of them slidin' gentle-like down mongst the coral an' wavy weeds—a heavin' over oysthers for the love of Buck O'Malley.

And one day it happens. Buck splits into an oysther shell half as big as the main hatch, and there 's the big lump of a wart wrinkled over wid mother-of-pearl the size of my fist. 'Tis true as Oi 'm telling you!

"Give me a chisel an' a hammer," says Buck O'Malley. "Oi 'm goin' to av a look."

"Ye 'll be spoilin' a fine blisther," says Oi.

"Go to ——," says he.

"Oi 'll do that some day. Shure. But the same brand 's on both of us so when the ——'s looking f'r one he'll be sathisfied to find the other one."

"Then fetch th' chisel," says he.

"You av laigs as long as mine," says Oi. "Besides, Oi don't want my share in that blisther spoiled."

Truth to tell, Oi was curiouser than him to see what might be under the wrinkle of that blisther, but 't wouldn't av done to agree wid him in anything.

Them naygur womin was watchin', an' ugly Betsy in particular f'r it was her that had brought it up.

An' Buck, carefuller than if he 'd been afther opening of a bottle wid Solomon's seal on it, cut round that blisther an' pries it off—an' Hivin hear me! Out comes a pearl wid the shape of a hen's egg an' as big. And widout a spot or wrinkle on it!

Oi couldn't speak. Me knees got quivery an' me mouth was like somebody 'd filled it full of brick-dust.

Buck O'Malley he stood there wid the thing in his two hands and his nose a-touching of it, mutthering over an' over—

"We 're rich—we 're rich—we 're rich!"

"It means ye'll be goin' back to the white-white lan?" says that bushy-head Kate who had been the Dutchman's wife. Her black eyes were on Buck O'Malley's face, and he seen the look too.

"No, no," says O'Malley. "Oh never 'ud I leave you, Kitty darlint."

"How about me?" says Betsy.

She had a face like somebody that didn't know how very well had made one out of mud and give it to her; but it was a better face than Kate's at that.

"How about me?" says Betsy, a-pushin' of the other woman aside.

O'Malley he looks up, a-thinkin' of something to say that 'ud smooth out the fool slip he's made when Kate puts her knife clear into the naked breasth of the naygur girl. "That for you, pig-woman," she says.

"Ow-ow," says Betsy, and sets down on the deck, a-bending over like she had the cramps. "Ow-ow-ow," she says. Then dies.

"Husband of mine," says Kate to O'Malley, wid the red-drippin' knife in her hand, "have Oi not done well?"

"Yis," says O'Malley, eying that knife. "Yis, sweetheart."

"Then throw that pig-born to the sharks," says Kate. And Oi understood why maybe the Dutchman was glad to lose his ship since we had took his wife away wid it.

"Pat," says he, "Pat, give me a hand wid this corpse."

"—— a hand, Buck O'Malley, will Oi ever touch to that poor haythen."

And looking over the side Oi see a dozen sharks wid their noses right up agin the bilge as if the word had been passed to stan' by. Queer how they know, them sharks. But know they do. Ax any man that 's followed the sea.

"Here then, hold this," says he, putting out the pearl to me, big as the great eye of God, and all shiny-bright like an angel's cheek.

"Nay, Buck O'Malley. Oi 'd rather be a poor man like Oi been than mix wid the curse that 's come upon us. Oi'll have no share in this thing!"

"So much the better f'r me then," says Buck O'Malley wid a laugh that made the flesh of me shrivel up wid chills, and Oi that minute wisht good Father O'Flynn, afther who Oi was named, had thrashed me harder than ever he did for bein' the worst boy in the parish.

"Hold it, Kitty sweet," says O'Malley.

He was that afraid to put it down any place for there never was a pearl half so big as the size of this one; and it were *alive* as if asleep an' breathin'.

Oi couldn't keep me eyes off of it as it lay there in the black hand of that naygrus—that pearl white and *alive* as the heart of a saint.

Says she to me—

"This buy much-much gin, tembac, calico, an' womin in your land?"

"Hivin yis!" says Oi. "It 'ud buy a crown off a king's head!"

"Heave-oh!" says O'Malley, him drunker wid pearl madness than ever he'd been on whisky, as he pushed that poor haythen girl head first over the side where the sharks was a-waitin' all in a row, grinnin'. It was her that had fetched up the shell wid the blisther that had the pearl, which made the other woman jealous and knife her. "Heave-oh," said O'Malley to the poor corpse. "It was Kate that I love best anyhow."

Oi cross meself three times, and Oi says—

"Buck O'Malley, that naygur girl will be standin' right there where God A'mighty can hear her on Judgment Morn!"

Says he:

"If ye knowed womin as well as me, you 'ud know they'll lie for you on Judgment as well as any other morn if ye give 'em the twitch of an eye an' a bit of a smile. Ain't it so, Kitten darlint?"

"Keep off," says Kitten darlint, pointin' the end of that knife at him. "Keep off till Oi 've had a word wid you."

"Ye black haythen," says O'Malley. "Oi 'll beat your head off! What ye mean—Ow Kitten darlint, what ye mean pullin' a glint of steel on yez own Buckie-boy?"

"Me own father was a white man," says the girl, though she didn't look it. "And are ye ever going to be a-leaving me an' going back to your own land?"

"Never, darlint! Never!"

"An' will ye ever be gettin' of another woman to crowd me off my bed?"

"Never, Kitten girl. Never! How could you be askin' of such!"

"Ye 'll be happy to stay right wid me, here on this island?" says she.

"Oi 'll stay anywhere wid ye, Katey sweet—forever! Now be lettin' me av the pearl again an'——"

"Ye haven't been telling of a lie to me?"

"Never!"

"Ye 'll stay right here wid me? Ye promise that?"

"Oi 'd stay in —— wid you, sweet. Now be a-givin'——"

Then says that black girl who had heard from her mother the ways of a white man—

"You'll not be needin' of this then, to tempth yez away from me!"

And wid a swing of her arm— Ow! Oi

saw a twinkle of white shimmer through the sun, then the soft splash where it hit; an' we was poor again as old Satan afther Gabriel had pulled out all his tail-feathers an' kicked him down the stairs.

O'Malley he stood there gaspin' for air; then wid a yell he jumps, an' the fist of him took her in the jaw an' she fell over the skylight and her laigs quivered like a frog's that 's dyin'.

"Ye black dirt, into the water wid yez an' find that pearl— Oi 'll kill ye! Don't ye come up widout it!"

He was grabbin' her by the hair when Oi says—

"Buck O'Malley, do you be thinkin' the dead girl that 's in there 'ud be givin' up that pearl?"

But he 's clear crazy wid deaf ears. "Over ye go," says he to her, dragging her over the deck by the hair.

She 's no more than half-alive, but is whisperin'—

"Sharks—there be sharks!"

"Buck O'Malley," says Oi, " 'twould be murther, an' a-ready there's been one dead woman this ——'s day!"

"Ye put her up to it!" says he, wid the mad look in his eyes. " 'Twill be murther, an' yez are it!"

Wid that he leaped at me, an' Oi throwed him aside for there was no blood-thirst in me that black day. He was as big a man as Oi, wid madness in his heart.

Says Oi—

"Oi told her nothin'—'twas the wise woman of a mother as told her everythin'——"

And we come together an' by the heat of his mouth on me face Oi knew it was one of us had to die; and Oi says to myself—

"The —— takes the one he wants most!"

Then from wheel to knightshead we fought, rakin' me shoulder on the mainmast as we passed, an' jammin' of his head agin the foremast fife rail as Oi snatched f'r a pin an' missed. From capstan to skylight we fought back again, reelin' like drunk men, wid his arm around me neck, and me teeth in his wrist. An' of a sudden somethin' sharp takes me in the back, an' gives me such fear-strength Oi up an' heaves, so O'Malley stumbles backward an' the two of us pitch over the rail wid nothin' in me ears but the screech of the black girl as had knifed me!

'Twas a fair show for us both, an' the —— took his choice, or maybe as Oi sometimes think, 't was the black Betsy girl, for something I couldn't see tore O'Malley loose from around me, an' Oi climbed in over the mizzen chains wid nary a scratch but the drippin' gash of a knife.

An' there was that Black Kate bendin' over the rail an' starin' down like she was watchin' of her own heart bein' tore to pieces.

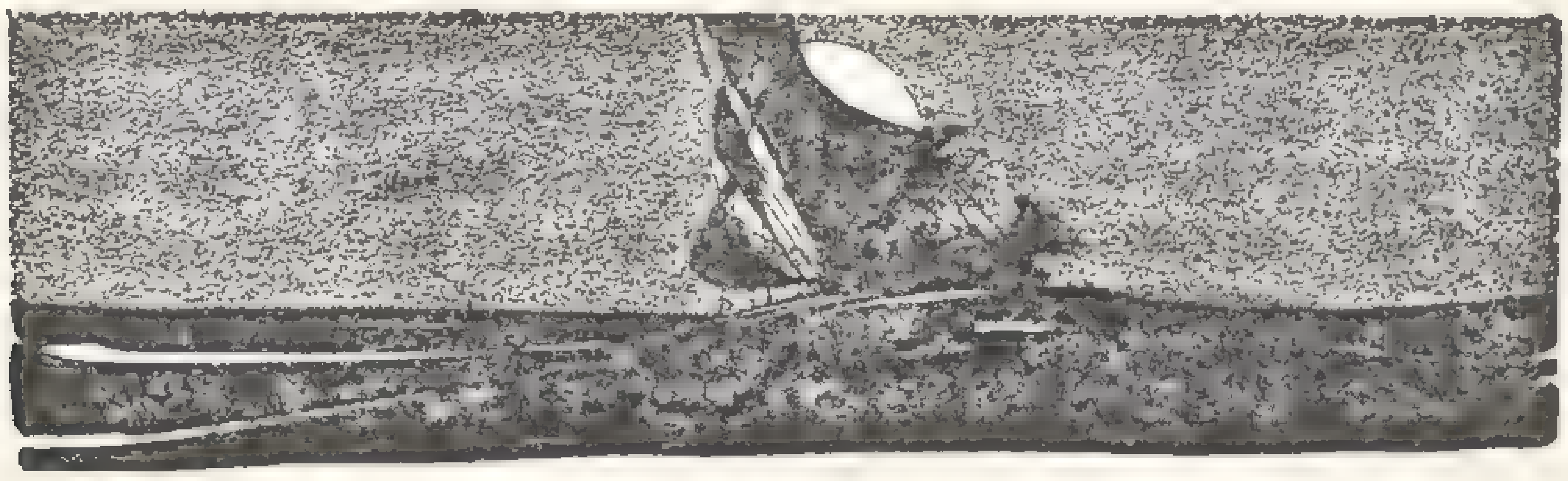
When she looks up and sees me, she gives a yell an' falls down like Oi 'd bashed her wid an ax—but never a hand did Oi touch to her, not the whole three weeks Oi was beatin' back wid her an' the schooner to where her husband was, for Oi was wanting to clean my hands as much as Oi could.

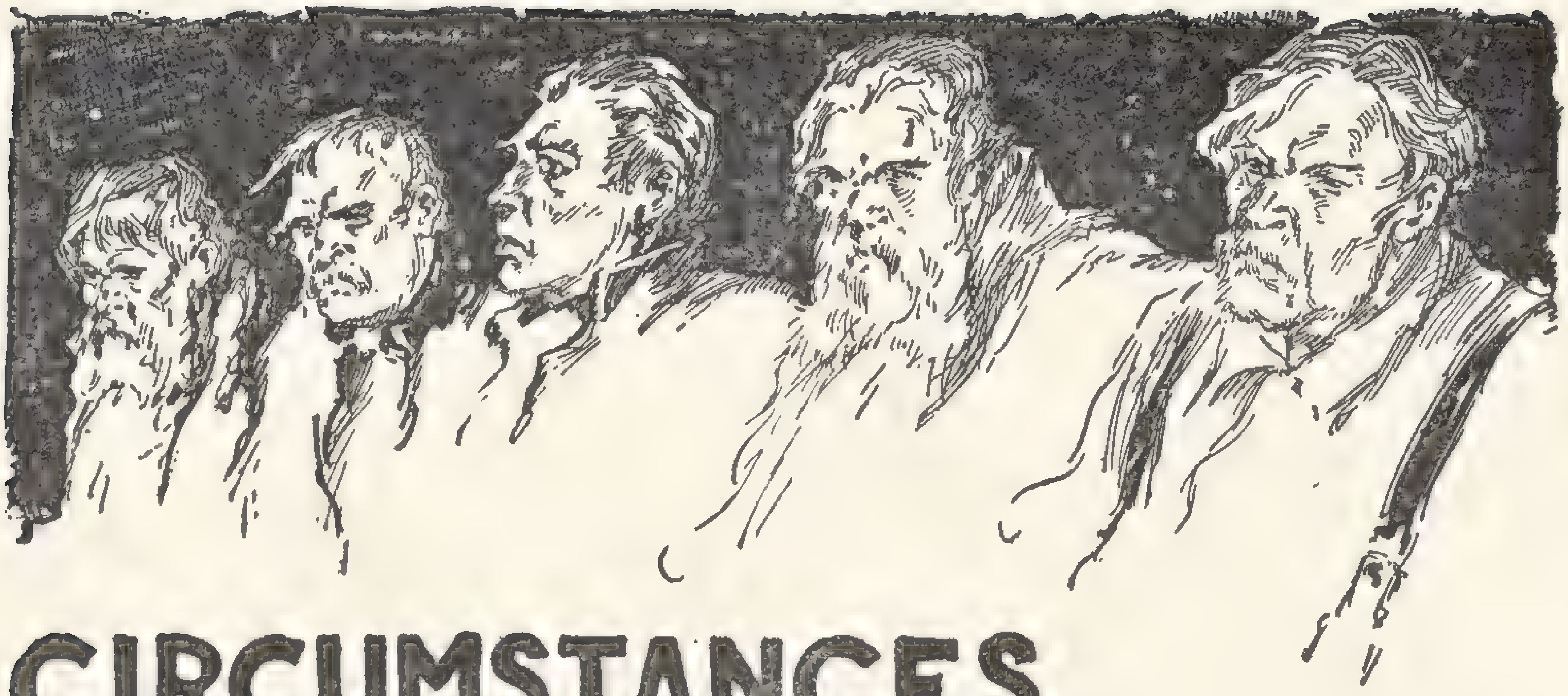
An' then what does she tell to that village an' her Dutch husband but that the other woman died of fever, an' that in a quarrel over herself Oi took O'Malley in the back wid an ax; an' that she keep me off from touchin' her wid a knife, an' got me to come back by swearin' she 'd fix it all up fine f'r me if Oi 'd only bring her home.

Yis, she fix it up fine, that sweet child of nathure!

But Dutchy was so glad to av his schooner again that he hid me away in his own storeroom till a trader come off-shore; then he sneaked me o' board—an' here Oi am—an' here Oi am, a tellin' of shameful deeds on me head to pay for a bowl of oysther soup.

Some day we'll have a real dinner, wid radishes an' beer, an' then Oi 'll tell ye a story worth two of this an' ivery bit as true!





CIRCUMSTANCES

By Howard B Beynon

THE smoky light of the little oil lamp sitting on the rough table beside the radio scarcely penetrated the corners of Bob Haffner's log shack, but it was sufficient to show that the face of every one of the five self-constituted judges, who sat on boxes and blocks along one side of the room, was cold and forbidding.

Time and again Ivan Thachuk's troubled brown eyes had scanned them for a trace of sympathy or even a sign that one of them believed his story. But he had found no hope there. The two witnesses, one on each side of him facing the judges across the table, were frankly hostile. Although in giving their evidence they had told no lies, they had colored the facts.

Ivan sensed that there was something wrong about this, but he could not put his finger on the injustice. The judges seemed to see none. Thachuk had been caught red-handed and admitted his guilt, but why would no one listen to his reasons for the robbery?

More and more his eyes sought those of clean-shaven, strong-faced Bob Haffner, sitting at the end of the table. Bob's reputation as the squarest man in the north country, together with the well-known fact that in his younger days he had proved up a bonanza claim on the English language, would have placed him at the head of the judges had he not been the man who was robbed.

Strangely enough his was the only face on which there was not written hostility. True there was no sign of sympathy either. He was wearing his poker face tonight, and any old prospector in the Herb Lake district could vouch that when Bob Haffner wore his poker face he was about as readable to the ordinary mortal as Chinese to an Eskimo.

It was unfortunate for Thachuk that he was caught looting Bob's shack on the very night that Joe Clemm's body was brought in from his lonely cabin. Clemm, it seemed, had been lost or marooned while prospecting and had crawled back to his shanty more dead than alive, only to find that some one had stripped it bare. That was not the first case of theft this summer, but it was the first that had resulted in a fatality. Clemm had been popular, and these old sourdoughs had sworn that they would make an example of the first man they caught stealing.

If Thachuk had contented himself with the roll of bills which he found in an old tobacco tin, he might have been handed over to the police and escaped with what punishment the laws of the cities decreed. But he had also stolen food, and that, in the northern wilds, is the unpardonable sin. "If you are hungry, enter any one's camp and eat, but on pain of death do not loot," is the unwritten law of the wilds.

Thachuk had committed his offense on the borderland. He was working for one of several big companies which were operating in this neighborhood. Supplies were plentiful, and there was no possibility of Haffner's starving on account of the theft.

"Circumstances," copyright, 1923, by Howard B. Beynon.

Also, it was well known that Thachuk had not been beyond this point during the summer. So he could not have committed any of the robberies in remote places that had so incensed the prospectors.

But the repeated lootings culminating in Clemm's death, told heavily against him. A conspiracy of circumstances was making him atone for all the sins of the North Country.

Al Sweeny, a lean, grizzled old-timer with a drooping mustache dyed at the tips with tobacco juice, and a stubble of beard that always seemed two weeks old, acted as chief justice. When the evidence was all in, he sat chewing reflectively and, from time to time, ejecting yellow liquid at a certain knot on the floor. His accuracy and technique were practically perfect.

"Well, fellers," he said at last. "Youse have heard the evidence. What's your verdict?"

A rustle went down the line. Several began filling their pipes or tamping the heel and relighting. They had been too preoccupied to smoke, but now they all seemed bent on being too busy to answer.

"Don't all speak to once," Sweeny drawled.

They stiffened to a man. They were not the kind to shirk their duty, and they wouldn't for the world have it thought that they were.

"Well, he owns up he done it, don't he?" a stocky man at the foot of the line spoke up.

The others nodded approval.

"Do yez figger on allowin' anything fer them there extenuatin' circumstances?" Al followed up in a tone of judicial impartiality.

"You mean about him havin' a sick wife and a bunch o' kids in Winnipeg?" the stocky jurist asked.

The chief justice planted another one fair on the knot and nodded. There was a long silence.

"Better be stirrin'," Al reminded them. "That there radio concert will be startin' afore long, and I calkilate we don't none of us want to miss it tonight. It ain't every day yez ken hear that there what-y'-muhcallum's band."

The others squirmed uneasily at this gentle hint that there would be no radio for them till a decision was reached.

"Kinder strikes me," a heavy-jowled man in the middle of the row volunteered, "kinder runs in my mind that most fellers as gets mixed up in a scrape manages to have a sick wife and a lot o' kids."

Ivan Thachuk half-rose from his seat.

"Meesters!" he cried. "Oh, my God, meesters, my wife she —— sick. That's what make me steal. Please, kind meesters, she have doctor, she have nurse, she have medicine. It cost —— big. I no have money." Tears rolled down his flat-featured face. "They tell me if she no get all them thing she die. I not know what to do. I clean crazy. I send all the money I got and they want more, all the time, more. I can't get no more. I run out in the dark. I want to die. I run down to river where it run white and roars. My head hot. The river look cool. It seem to be callin' me, I comin', but somebody inside me say, 'Ivan Thachuk, you coward! You go sleep, and let your wife and kids fight the world alone.' I sit down and cry. I go back. I see Bob Haffner house with radio. I no have radio. I no have 'nough to eat. My kids no have clo'es. My wife she die.

"The house is dark. I go in. I find money, lot of money, Haffner must be rich. I get sack and take food. I go out. These kind meesters grab me. I here.

"Please, kind meesters, don't send me to jail. My wife she die, my kids dey starve."

Once more his rather close-set eyes vainly swept the line of faces for a trace of sympathy. And Bob Haffner's expression was as noncommittal as ever.

Al Sweeny cleared his throat deliberately.

"Seems to me I ain't made myself clear to the prisoner yet," he said. "Jest gimme your 'tention and see if y' ken get it this time," he addressed Thachuk. "If this here court finds you guilty and don't allow nothin' fer them extenuatin' circumstances you're makin' so much noise about, you're not goin' to jail, you're goin' to die afore mornin'. Get me?"

◆

THACHUK looked incredulous and glanced covertly along the line to catch the flicker of a smile on some one's face. He had understood them to say at the beginning of the trial that death was to be the penalty if he was convicted, but he had thought that they were trying to frighten him.

He knew that Canada was a land of the free where such things could not happen. In fact he had heard some of these very men laughing at a well-dressed tenderfoot who had seriously inquired whether there was such a thing as the unwritten law of the north.

But the longer he looked into those set faces the more he doubted. Tomorrow, when he, Ivan Thachuk, was dead, they would still scout the very idea of the unwritten law. Ivan's face blanched. His pleading had failed. He would try a little defiance.

"If you kill me the police will get you and you get hung."

He watched keenly to see the effect of this shaft, but no one's expression changed. For nearly a minute no one spoke.

"What's your verdict, fellers?" Sweeny drawled.

" 'Cordin' to his own tell he jumped Bob's claim 'cause he didn't have none of his own," the stocky man spoke up. "That there may seem a purty good idear to some fellers, but it don't hit me right. Where would us fellers get off at if that kind o' thing was allowed? Foreby the stealin' I don't think he's fit to live hereabouts."

Grunts and nods of approval greeted this statement.

"I go away and no come back again," Ivan Thachuk offered eagerly.

"Then it's the opinion of this here court that he's guilty?" Al said, ignoring the offer.

"Guilty, guilty, guilty," went all down the line.

"And the court ain't allowin' nothin' fer extenuatin' circumstances?"

"No!" It was unanimous.

"We don't want to be no harder nor we got to." Al paused and registered another bull's-eye on the knot. "And if this here court has got no objection I move that we let him cross the divide the way he was goin' to when somethin' inside him told him he needed Bob's grub and wad. I got a canoe that ain't safe no more. And when they find it all smashed up below the rapids and pick Thachuk up somewheres near, they'll figger he borried it—same as he did Bob's vittles. 'Course it'll be too bad he got drawed over the rapids, leavin' a wife and fambly or two to mourn his loss."

He paused and squinted down the line.

"That's right, Al," they all agreed.

Bob Haffner had been tuning in on the radio.

"Concert's pretty well on, you'd better lay off and listen in," he said. "You can appoint a committee to escort Thachuk to the rapids afterward."

There were only four head-sets. So they had to take it in relays. Al Sweeny and two others came in on the current number. The two remaining judges and the two witnesses came in on the next, while Al and the stocky man guarded the prisoner. These eight old-timers had "chipped in" to buy the radio outfit and all had equal rights. They had unanimously agreed on Bob's shack for its location, because his table was just right for eight to sit into a game of poker.

It happened that Bob Haffner, Sweeny and others, were in on the last number. Bob sat with his head set on a moment after the others had shed theirs and begun talking. He suddenly stiffened to attention and raised a hand for silence. One of the others grabbed his head set again, but Bob stopped him with a frown and a sharp downward flip of the hand. In a few seconds he relaxed and laid his head set aside.

"What was it?" Al asked.

"Message."

"Who for?"

Bob jerked his head toward the prisoner. Everybody sat up.

"His wife's dead," Haffner announced.

"Dead!" Thachuk's unseeing eyes stared out of a face suddenly grown gray and old. Slowly he crumpled up. His guards caught him before he fell. They carried him gently to Bob's bunk and would have thrown a pail of cold water in his face if Bob had not restrained them and used a wet towel instead.

When Ivan came to, he had the choice of eight flasks to brace him up. He took Bob's. Haffner was the only one who had not been openly hostile. Thachuk wanted none of the others' whisky.

"Kill me. Why you not hurry?" he gasped. "And kill d' kids so dey won't starve. You'll find dem on Stella Ave'nue 'mong de odder bohunks. Tell dem you're de kind meesters what killed dere mudder and fadder. Tell dem you got to kill dem because dere fadder stole——"

"Aw, we didn't kill your missus," Al cut in.

His jaws were going like a squirrel's. Several of the others were puffing jerkily at their pipes. Bob Haffner alone showed no sign of emotion. One of the men edged toward the door. In a too obvious effort to be casual he made his action conspicuous.

"You're not thinking of going yet?" Bob asked in a matter of fact tone. "You might get elected to the committee, you know."

The man wavered a moment and came back. The minor judges and the two witnesses looked appealingly at Al Sweeny. If there was any hope of escape it was through him. For, if anybody could move the relentlessly just Bob Haffner, it was Al. Even he quailed before the task. In his struggle to broach the subject he inadvertently swallowed his tobacco and had to take another chew before he could collect his thoughts. It made it a lot harder that Bob was nonchalantly clearing the table for the usual game just as if everything were settled.

"Bob, them there extenuatin' circumstances," he managed to get out.

Bob paused with the table cloth—a piece of brown paper—in his hand and looked up.

"You see," Al plowed on, "that there radio message was evidence we hadn't got when the court made its decision."

"Want to reopen the case?" Bob asked indifferently.

"Yah, that's about it."

"Well, hop to it. I got my money and grub back. I have no more interest in the case than the rest of you."

"Take your seats, fellers," Al ordered. And it was done with alacrity.

"Is it the opinion of this court that the prisoner has got a lesson he won't fergit in a hurry?"

"Yes," the answer was prompt and unanimous.

"Do youse feel in duty bound to kill a dead woman's husband and make a batch of orphans?"

"No!" The answer was equally prompt and emphatic.

"Do youse declare the prisoner discharged?"

"We do."

"The prisoner is discharged and this here court is adjourned," Al declared solemnly.

Nobody seemed keen on a game after that, and with one consent the men all filed out of the cabin. Bob went to the bunk and asked, not unkindly—

"How are you coming?"

Thachuk only muttered.

"The boys are feeling kind of soft just now," Bob told him. "But they may sleep it off. There is a train from Mile Eighty-two for LePas some time tonight, and there's one from LePas to Winnipeg in the morning. You'd better mush while the mushing lasts. And here—" he stuffed a roll of bills into the man's hand—"I'm not using it and it will come in handy for the wife and kids."

"Sank you, meester," Thachuk said apathetically.

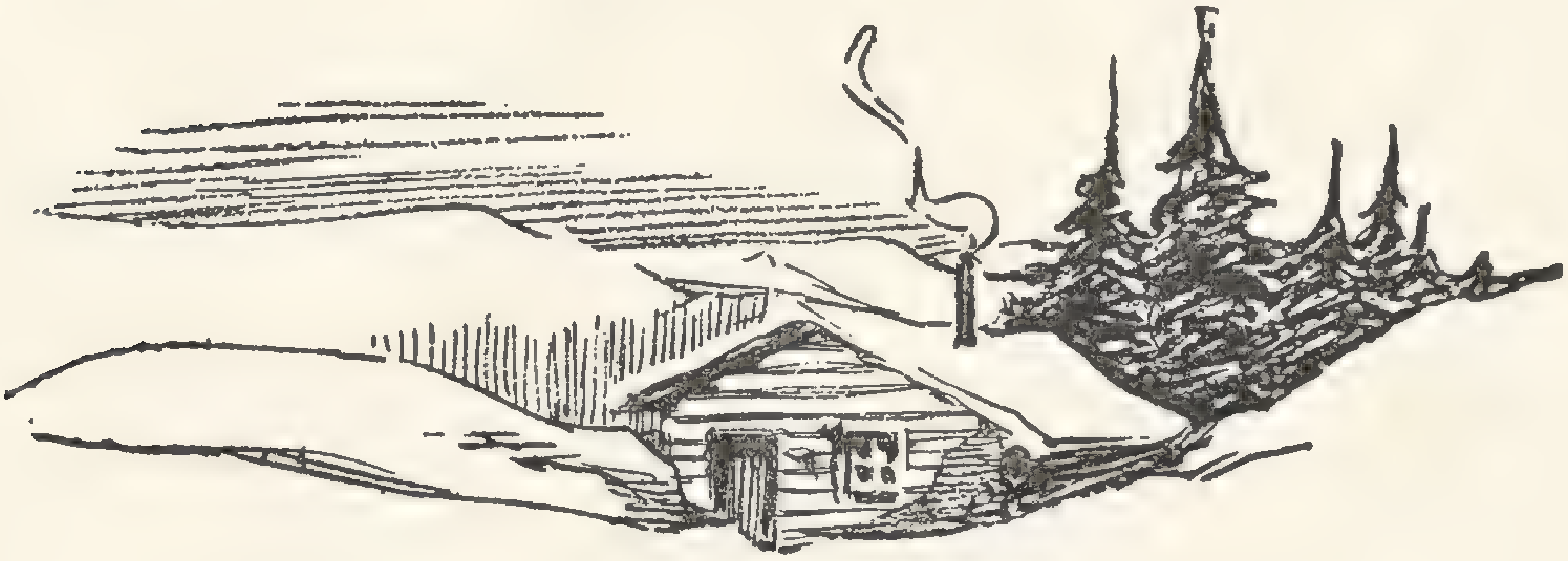
Then he sat up with a jerk.

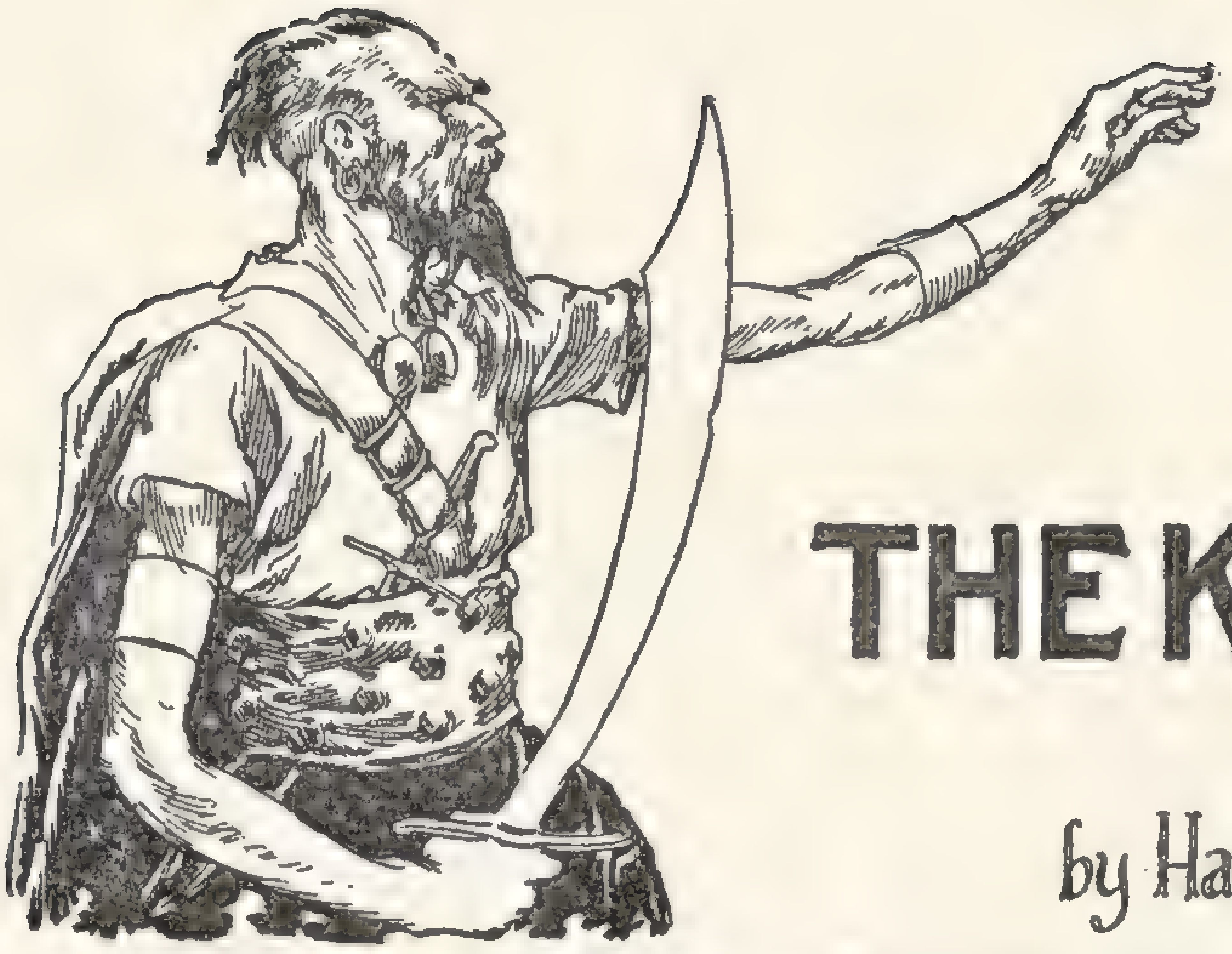
"I thought my wife she dead," he cried.

"So did the boys," Bob smiled. "That's why you're alive."

"Meester!" Ivan's voice broke. "Why you do that for me?"

"A long time ago," Haffner sighed, "I knew a young fellow whose life was ruined by one slip. No, don't look sympathetic. His name was not Bob Haffner—not then," he added under his breath.





THE KING DIES

by Harold Lamb

Author of "The Baiting of the Warriors," "An Edge to a Sword," etc.

THE roar of the cataracts drowned all other sounds. It was a mighty voice, that of Father Dnieper—the river that ran through the vast steppe of the Cossacks to the shores of the Black Sea, the borderland of the Turk.

Here and there where rocks thrust up in the gray flood, a veil of mist hung over the cataracts—mist foam-flecked, and colored by shifting rainbows.

It was late afternoon, in the Autumn of the year 1611 of our Lord. The only human being visible in the calm water below the cataracts was a thing of skin and huddled bones covered only partially by rags, a fisherman. He sat in a skiff at the edge of the reeds that lined the bank, holding a line of twisted gut.

Then he shaded his eyes and pulled in his line hurriedly. Out of the mist that drifted over the lower cataracts a man emerged in a canoe. Kneeling, Tatar fashion and using the short, broad oar as a paddle, he swept around a nest of rocks and plunged over one of the rapids.

For a moment, while the fisherman gazed from narrowed eyes, the paddler lost control of his craft. It turned broadside to the current, and swept down upon the last of the rocks.

Without hurrying, the man in the narrow skiff shifted his paddle to the other side, checked the rush of his boat, and reversed ends in time to fly past the glistening black stones. Unharmed, he glided out on the calmer current of the basin and directed his course toward the bank where the boat of the fisherman was anchored.

By now the watcher perceived that the man who had shot the cataracts was long and bony of figure, that his sunburned head was shaven except for the scalplock that hung from the ridge of his skull, like a cock's comb. This meant that he was not a Tatar but a masterless man[*]—a Cossack.

So the fisherman, instead of pushing his boat to the shore and running away, laid some wet rushes and weeds over his catch of sturgeon. The Cossacks, he knew, were the defenders of the border against the all-powerful Turks and the Tatar tribesmen; but Cossacks had a way of being hungry and of taking whatever food came to hand when they were.

"Health to you, uncle!" The stranger checked his craft within speaking distance. "Can you tell me where the *Siech* is?"

At this the fisherman dropped his line in fright, and glanced from the corners of his eyes down the broad river. Here, where the Dnieper widened were hundreds of islands, fringed by reeds and willows. On one of these islands was the *Siech*, or war-encampment of the Zaporoghian Cossacks.[†]

In the *Siech* gathered adventurers, wanderers, restless Cossacks—all who were sworn enemies of the Turk. Sometimes the Zaporoghians numbered thousands, sometimes hundreds; usually they were at

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[*] Rover, or masterless man, the true meaning of the word Kazak, or Cossack.

[†] Literally "Men from below the rapids."

"The King Dies," copyright, 1923, by Harold Lamb.

war with the Moslems or the Polish nobility that claimed them—fruitlessly—as serfs by feudal right. The situation of this farthest outpost of the Christian swords was kept a secret. The camp might be on any one of the multitude of islands, all looking alike from the channels.

Only the Zaporoghians themselves, a few of the river-men, and the pedlers and minstrels who dogged the heels of the warriors knew the secret of its place. And the secret was well-kept because those who clung to the fringe of Cossack power knew that their bodies would be torn apart by the warriors if they betrayed the war-encampment.

A month ago a flotilla of the sultan's boats had come up from the Black Sea with several thousand janissaries, armed and equipped to wipe out the nest of Cossacks. They had landed on the island where the barrack huts of the frontiersmen stood. But the warriors of the *Siech* had moved the day before to another island, on a whim which they afterward attributed to the intervention of good Saint Nicholas himself.

"You are not one of the Zaporoghians," the fisherman muttered from toothless gums. The stranger wore a leather *svitza* flung over his high shoulders; his lean arms were bare, his wide pantaloons were of the richest green nankeen. His sword was a Tatar simitar, and his beard, instead of falling over his chest, was trimmed to a point. And his brown eyes slanted slightly, suggesting Asiatic blood.

The fisherman did not wish to be tied in a sack and put to rest forever in Father Dnieper by the Cossacks for giving information to a spy of the Turks. Not he! The Dnieper banks were alive with enemies who would pay a round sum in gold sequins to learn the position of the *Siech*.

"Nay, old fellow." The stranger's teeth flashed under his drooping mustache. "I am Demid, and I have come from the river Don in the Northeast. I seek a friend in the camp."

He waited a moment patiently.

"If you don't speak up I'll take one of those fish you've hidden and ram it down your gullet," he added without a trace of anger.

"Eh—eh!" The river man chuckled. "Now I know that you must be a Cossack knight. It is the way of the noble sirs to address a chap like that—only they threaten in the first breath, and kick a fellow with the second and throw him a silver piece with the third. They are splendid folk, but then, alas, they always scatter wealth as soon as they get it, on anything that comes to hand."

He sighed.

"Not for long are the same Cossack faces seen about here. Their noble limbs soon adorn the torture racks of the Poles, or fester under the mud of the Black Sea!"

Having completed his scrutiny of the newcomer, the old man now pointed down-river. Two hours' paddling would bring Demid, he said, to some large islands. If he would look then on the left hand, toward the Tatar bank, he would see one with three oaks standing on a knoll at its head. The *Siech* was on the island below this.

"But if you are really going to the camp," continued the fisher, "you must swim to the island, or find a horse and jump him over the mud wall, or get a Tatar's head, somehow, and tie it to your belt. Every Zaporoghian must perform some feat, to distinguish him, or the noble knights and their leaders will not drink with him."

Demid nodded, and tossed the other a gold coin that flashed in the sunlight. The river-man caught it eagerly and scrambled to his feet to bow like a marionette.

"By the Father and the Son, you are verily a noble knight. I will pray every saint's day for your soul, after you have been slain by the Moslem swords. A true Cossack, as God is my witness!"

A half-smile touched Demid's thin lips as he moved away. Still, the fisher, intoxicated by the glint of gold, called after him.

"May you earn endless glory in the steppe, good sir! May you slice off the head of a hero of the sultan himself. May the children speak your name, and the gray-haired *bandura* players sing of your Cossack glory when the high grass grows over your bones. And until then may you find gold and jewels—fine horses and silk garments—the fairest women of the infidels—the richest wine to warm your veins——"

The roar of the cataracts drowned his words.

SHORTLY before sunset Demid sighted the island of the three oaks and, steering to the left, passed slowly along a body of land bordered by rushes as tall as spears.

Although the young Cossack had lived in a wilderness and had hunted from the time when he was able to loose an arrow from a bow—although he studied the bank of the island carefully and analyzed every sound—he perceived nothing that indicated the presence of men, unless it were a haze in the air that might be smoke. When, however, some water-fowl flapped up from the shore-growth some distance ahead of him, he turned inshore and stood up in his canoe.

Whereupon the rushes were parted in front of him and a bearded face peered out over the muzzle of an arquebus.

"Halt and speak your name and rank! What the —— do you want?"

He submitted to inspection, and after a moment an arm reached forth and pulled in his canoe, and another voice muttered a warning not to break the rushes. Poling his boat through the forest of giant reeds, he touched the mud and sprang out to pull it up on the shore, with the help of the Cossack patrol that had challenged him. Several other skiffs were visible, and a stack of oars. Two of the guards took him along a faint path through willow-clumps, up over a grassy ridge to a wide plain.

Here in a bowl-like depression fires glimmered in front of him, and he passed lines of stalls where Jews and Armenians were selling brandy, food and garments to a smattering of Cossacks. On the other side of the path forges, sunk in the earth, were clanging and clattering as sturdy smiths labored at mending swords or beating out dented armor.

Entering a wall of dried mud, Demid for the first time saw the thatched roofs of the Zaporoghian *kurens*—the barracks. Between these were wide squares where groups of men sat at ease with their pipes, or ate their supper of *kasha* and barley cakes. In other groups where corn brandy was flowing he saw warriors leaping about in the wild dance of the steppe, their silver heels thudding on the hard packed earth, the firelight mingling with the red glow of sunset to crimson their sweating faces. A shout of approval at some feat of the dancers broke through the muttered voices that accompanied the strumming of the *banduras*.

Some of the warriors called a greeting to the two who escorted him, and looked at Demid carelessly.

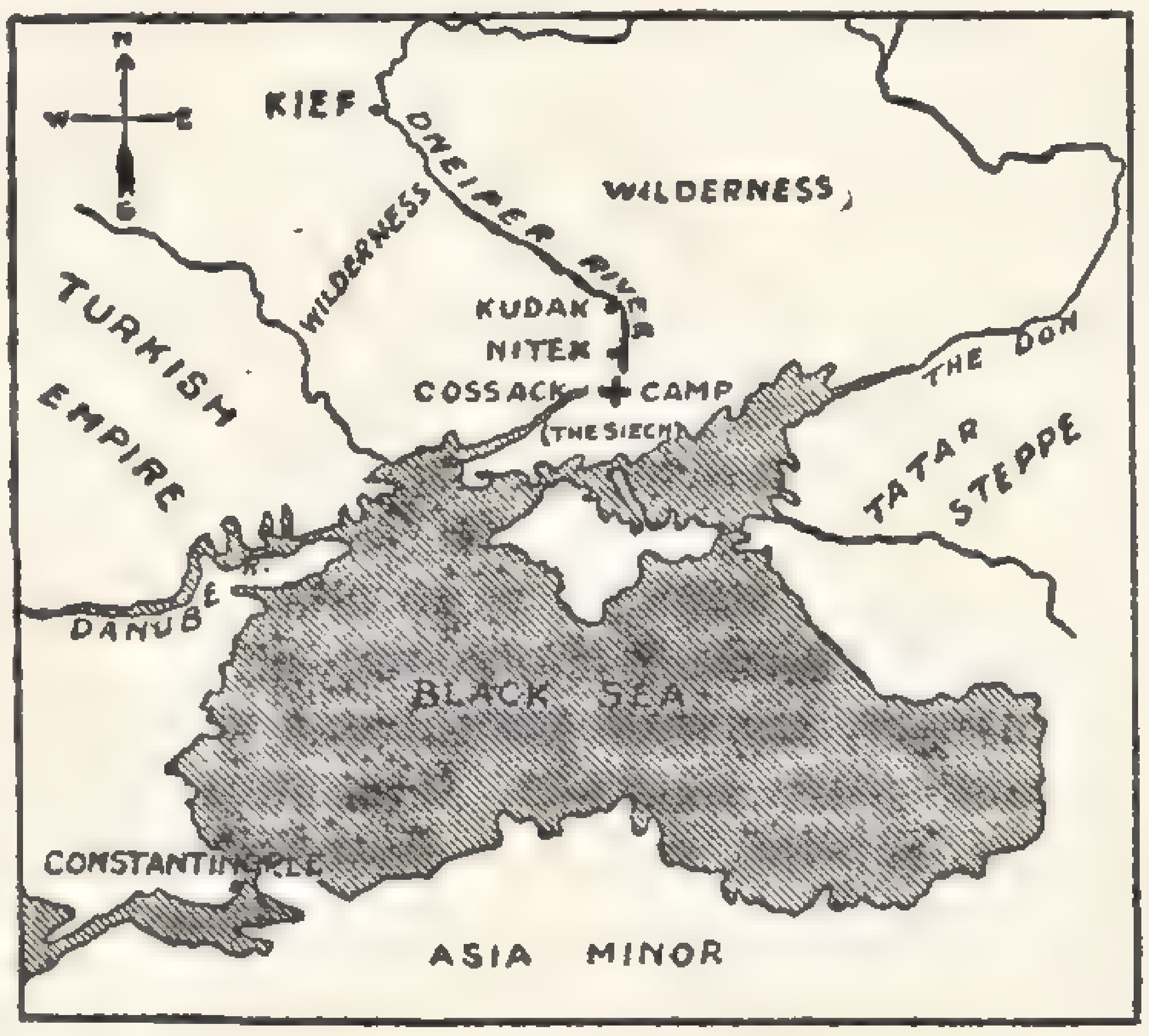
"—— take you Vladimir, and you, too, Ostab—what have you got there?"

"A Tatar, good sirs."

A roar of laughter greeted this. "Ostab has caught a Tatar—must have set out a bowl of milk for him to lap!"

Demid had passed the last years in the river-watch on the upper Dnieper, where he rode patrol alone, and—although he had his share of fighting—he had never entered a gathering of warriors before. These were tall men, almost invariably, and all bore scars of some kind.

"No, no!" shouted a pock-marked giant, looking up from a throw of dice, "Look at his beard! Hide of Satan! It was trimmed by a Polish wench. Don't you see he's a Pole—fell off his horse, by my faith, and couldn't get up again. So Ostab caught him."



Demid did not see Ayub, the stout knight of the Urals who had befriended him not long since on the Dnieper. He forebore asking for his acquaintance, until he had been examined and passed by the *koshevoi ataman*, the chief of the Cossacks.

At the entrance of a small hut in the center of the camp several warriors were at dice, while others were chuckling over a Turkish chess-board on which two of their number were rolling about the gold and silver chessmen, heedless of the rules of the game, which they could not play. The thin faces of vagabonds were pressed over the shoulders of wandering *boyars*, noblemen who had gambled or warred away fortunes and had come to the *Siech* for the last throw of fortune that could end only in death.

A man with a black beard and a priceless ermine coat spotted with tar rose at their coming. Demid squared his shoulders, sniffing the air heavy with smoke, with the scent of dried grass and sweating sheepskins. The *koshevoi ataman* glanced at him keenly, listened to the report of the guards, and asked briefly if Demid believed in God, and Christ.

"Well, then, Cossack, cross yourself and join whichever *kuren* you prefer."

"Ayub is my brother-in-arms. I will go to his *kuren*."

The brows of the Zaporoghian chief knitted together, and he looked at Demid long and searchingly.

"In what manner did this fellow come to the camp?" he demanded at length of the guards.

"Like a fisherman, sitting in a canoe," grunted the one named Vladimir scornfully. "A woman's feat, that!"

Demid recalled the warning of the riverman, that each recruit to the ranks of the *Siech* must perform some feat, to be welcomed by the gathering on the island.

"Take him to Ayub, if he wants to go!"

The chief turned back to his hut, and Demid was escorted, not to the line of barracks, but to the central square where a torch burned beside the great drum that served to muster the men of the camp in an emergency.

Here he beheld a long spear stuck into the ground. Bound to the spear by cords that held his arms above his head was Ayub.

Demid's solitary friend in the *Siech* glanced up, and hung his head. He lacked both sword and cap.

"He is a thief," said Vladimir bluntly. "One of the bravest of our ranks, a thief! This dawn was he strung up as you see, to abide here for three days. If, at the end of three days the four hundred gold sequins that he stole—or an equal value—are not restored to their owner, he will be cut to pieces by Cossack swords."

The sentry shifted his arquebus to the other shoulder, and added in a lower tone:

"Do you wish some fine mead, Ayub? Or some gruel and bread? A man must die, you know—that always happens—still, by my faith, a comrade need not starve."

Ayub shook his head.

"Leave me Vladimir and you, too, Demid. I am a thief."

The guard went away, but Demid sat down on the drummer's bench near by and took out his pipe and tobacco sack. Lighting his pipe at the torch, he studied the burly form of Ayub thoughtfully.

"Tell me why you are a thief."

It was no easy matter to get the veteran to talk about his crime. The *bandura* players, he said mournfully, would not mention his name, hereafter; children would point at him; his old comrades of the *Siech*—and Ayub had many—would forget him.

To steal, in the camp, was one of the greatest of crimes. The night before Ayub had been drinking, in the stalls of the camp-followers. He had run out of money and had gone back to his barracks to sleep. In the dark, he had thrown himself down in another man's sheepskins. But that often happened.

In the morning, the *ataman*, the captain of the barracks, had discovered that a sum of money he had hidden in the earth under his sleeping-robes was missing. Four hundred sequins had disappeared during the night. Ayub had been seen by several of the warriors to go into the shed and fumble around among the sheepskins. The *koshevoi ataman* was called to investigate, Ayub was searched, and a half-dozen of the gold coins were found in one of his coat-pockets.

"—— take me," muttered the Cossack, "if I laid hand on one of Boron's coins! I went to sleep, right off, in the barracks, and did not move until dawn."

"Who is Boron?"

"A *bogatyr*, a hero—he's my captain." Ayub considered. "That's the worst of it. Last evening, in a Jew's dram-shop I said that he was the only Cossack in the camp who was rich—who didn't spend all he had on his comrades, like the rest of us. The Jew repeated what I said."

Two things had weighed against Ayub in the minds of the Cossacks. First, he had slighted Boron who was one of the most reckless among men who admired daring in any form. Only on their last expedition to the Black Sea, Boron had led the boats of his *kuren* to the strait of the Imperial City* itself, and burned down the Pharos, the light-house. Half of the *kuren* had been wiped out and Boron had fought his way through the ranks of the Moslems single-handed and escaped with his life by swimming. In the last year he had taken a cart-load of spoil from the Moslems.

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* Constantinople.

Second, Ayub had claimed to be penniless when he left the drinking-place. But in the morning some gold-pieces had been found in his pocket.

"Why did you say that against Boron?" asked Demid after a while.

"Because I had been drinking corn brandy."

The veteran shook his head sadly.

"Besides, it's true. Up the Dnieper, where you came from, the captain has a tower, guarded by serfs, that glitters like a princess' arm with gold and such things."

Demid nodded. He remembered the tower. He puffed at his clay pipe for a long while. The bustle of the camp disturbed him—who had come from the east where the tribesmen tended horses, and lacked for human companionship. He was troubled. He liked Ayub very much—the stout Cossack had befriended him, and that was a debt that must be paid. But how?

"Four hundred sequins," he reflected aloud. "I have eighty, taken from a Greek merchant, up the river. Will your comrades add more to it?"

Again Ayub shook his head. Many of his cronies of the *kuren* had died at the Pharos; the others were stripped of gold and gear by now—the raid on the sultan's towns had been two moons ago, and Cossacks never kept their spoil for long.

Demid gazed up at the canopy of stars beyond the spluttering torch. His comrade could not have been so drunk that he took Boron's coins without knowing it—Ayub had a hard head, when it came to mead or brandy. It was curious that he should have overlooked the gold-pieces in his pocket. But then the true thief might have placed them there when he dug up the captain's treasury.

"Of course Boron has wealth enough," muttered Ayub, "but the hero is angered at me. Besides, why should I ask him? See, there he is by the *koshevoi's* hut, playing at chess."

He was surprized when he saw that Demid had left his side without making a sound.

In fact the man from the Don had sauntered over to the group by the chief's fire. The hero Boron reclined on a sable robe, taking up the Turkish chessmen and explaining to a group of listeners the powers of the various pieces and cracking a jest about each.

Boron had wide shoulders and muscular hands—a hawk's nose, and keen, attentive eyes. A bold man, and hard, Demid thought. No man could say that Boron had a loud tongue and a quiet sword. Apparently the bystanders lacked skill to engage him in a game of chess.

"Good sir," said Demid, "will you play with me?"

"Or with Satan himself!" Boron's teeth flashed under a black mustache. "If you have a wager to put up, on victory. What man are you?"

"It is Ayub's new brother-in-arms," answered some one, and the *bogatyr* surveyed the young Cossack with a quizzical smile.

"Have you skill at this game—comrade of Ayub, the thief?"

"Some little have I learned from the friendly Tatars of the Don," responded Demid promptly, and the onlookers nudged each other, whispering that the new recruit looked like a Tatar.

But Boron waved them aside when Demid poured out the gold-pieces from his pouch to the ground beside the board. "Here are eighty sequins, noble sir, and with them will I wager my leather coat and silk girdle, set with blue stones—against a hundred gold-pieces."

The amount caused the watchers to stare, but Boron immediately counted out that number of coins and shoved them out with his foot. The two men set up the pieces and Boron began the play, moving his miniature warriors out carelessly and talking with his friends the while. Soon, however, he frowned and began to devote all his attention to the game.

Demid had put forward a skirmish line of pawns that broke up the older man's attack and cost him a piece. Boron tried to sweep away his adversary's defense, and exchanged knights and rooks readily but found himself the loser by another piece at the end of the maneuvering.

"The ——!"

He swept all the men off the board.

"I yield you this game and the hundred sequins. Come, double stakes the next time—two hundred gold coins each of us will wager. My word is good for the amount, is it not?"

He glanced up at the watching Cossacks.

"It is, *bogatyr*—indeed, what ant out of a dunghill would question your word?"

Demid, setting up the men anew, nodded. It was what he wished, for now the value of four hundred sequins lay on the issue of the second game. Word of the large wager spread through the camp and warriors strolled over to watch the progress of the miniature armies on their wooden battlefield. Little did the men of the *Siech* know about the game, but the meaning of a piece lifted from the board and tossed aside was clear to them. That knight or that bishop had been slain.

Boron played as swiftly as before, but in silence now, his lean face impassive, his eyes glittering. When he picked one of Demid's valuable castles from the board the watchers drew their pipes from their lips and nodded to each other.

"Hey, this fellow Boron knows what he's about, hide of the —— He can match a king with a knight—he has a head like a prince!"

Quietly, the man from the Don met the *ataman's* attack with all his skill. The gold-pieces that lay beside his knee would ransom Ayub, if he could win the game. And he was holding his own, although he knew now that Boron was the better player, and that the first game had been lost through carelessness.

Under cover of Boron's main attack, the *ataman* had advanced a pawn to Demid's last line of squares, where, by the rules of the game, it became a queen. Eagerly the Zaporoghian made a move, and cried:

"*Shah ma'at*[*] Your king dies!"

Demid looked up quickly, and presently he smiled.

"The king dies."

The game was over; he had lost, and he handed over his coat and girdle to Boron who swept up the gold-pieces. But so gravely had he spoken the three words that the bystanders and Boron stared at him searchingly.

"Well, you won't ransom your comrade, Ayub, after all," remarked the *ataman*. "Unless you can bring up your Tatar allies who taught you chess and set the *Siech* at war. Then the drum would be beaten, and Ayub would be freed and given a sword, to fight like a Christian instead of dying like a dog."

And, rolling himself in his sables on the ground, he went to sleep. But Demid remained sitting by the embers of the fire until dawn showed him the scattered chessmen—the kings and warriors lying helpless beside the stage where they had moved in pomp and ceremony a few hours since.

Then Demid stood up, his simitar under his arm, and went over to where Ayub half-lay, half-hung against the stout spear. The prisoner turned a drawn face toward his friend and blinked wearily. Presently, as he noticed that Demid lacked coat and girdle and purse, his beard bristled in a smile.

"Eh, I see that Boron left you your pantaloons. The good knights who passed by on their way to the barracks spoke of your game."

"He plays well."

Demid glanced back at the prone figure under the sables. No one was watching them. He could cut Ayub down and they might escape from the *Siech*, but Ayub would not do this. To flee out of the camp like a stoned dog, and live thereafter in some distant village—no, Ayub would not do that.

"Hearken, Ayub," said the man from the Don, "I am going from the *Siech*. You have two days more of grace. Before sunrise of the second day I will be back. Look for me then."

"Nay, Demid, what the —— are you about? Just hear the lad—hasn't been in the *Siech* for breakfast yet, and has done nothing but make an ass of himself at chess! To slink out of sight! That won't help you make friends among the fine knights, at all——"

But Demid had disappeared already into the thin, morning mist.

The gray curtain of mist was heavier over the river, and he was able to take out his canoe and thrust it through the reeds without being observed by any one except a sleepy sentry. Answering the challenge of the guard, he explained that he was setting forth on a hunt.

As soon as he was clear of the rushes, he headed north. Coming that noon to the cataracts, he left his boat in the keeping of the old fishermen who had wished him luck, and struck inland, through the dense oak forest that lined the western bank of the Dnieper.

IT WAS toward the end of the third watch, in the second night of Demid's absence, that Ayub was roused from a doze by a sound near at hand.

The limbs of the big Cossack were stiff, and utter weariness held down his eyelids. He thought at first that day was come, and the cooks of the *kurens* were starting up the fires. But the stars were still brilliant overhead and no lights showed by the black bulk of the barracks. Even the late revellers had stumbled into their sheepskins.

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[*] Shah ma'at—sheikh ma'at—checkmate.

Ayub knew that the *Siech* slept, but not the full, deep sleep of a man who has eaten well and drunk his share of wine. The Cossacks had been quarreling; they were restless, under the long spell of idleness; most of the men were in debt to the Jews and Armenians; money was a forgotten thing.

That day a Cossack had killed another man, and had been buried alive under the coffin of his victim. What would you? The Zaporoghians loved not idleness.

The sound caught Ayub's attention again, and he made out the form of a man stooping to enter the hut where the drummer slept near the great drum of the camp. For a while he listened, hearing only a distant, heavy breathing. Probably the drummer was going to sleep, he thought.

Before long he saw the form of the man again. This time it went away from the hut, still stooping. Ayub nodded drowsily, and half-heard something sliding over the hard earth behind the nocturnal visitor. It seemed to him to be a sack of meal or corn. The man and his burden vanished in the darkness, going toward the stables.

Ayub gritted his teeth against the cramping pain in his limbs and looked toward the east. By the feel of the air he knew that dawn was not far away.

Boom—boom!

Almost at Ayub's ear the drum—a bull's hide stretched over a wooden frame—resounded to powerful blows.

Ayub twisted around in his bonds and stared vainly into the shadows. The drum roared on. He wondered why the drummer was without a light and why the *koshevoi ataman* had not been aroused before the alarm was sounded.

Lights flickered in the windows of the barracks. Boots thudded on the ground, but no longer in the *hopak* and *trepak* of the dance. The fire by the chief's hut blazed up and Ayub saw the *koshevoi* stride out, buckling on his belt, his baton in hand. Around Ayub masses of Cossacks gathered, and in the cleared space by the drum the leader and the captains of the *kurens* assembled.

A voice cursed sleepily.

"Who beats the muster at this hour?"

Demid was standing by the drum, pounding it with the flat of his drawn sword.

Torches and lanthorns were brought and the chief looked at the young Cossack inquiringly.

"Where is the drummer with his sticks? What does this mean?"

Still keeping his sword in hand, Demid bowed to the chief of the Cossacks and glanced around the ring of faces that peered at him angrily.

"It is time, good sir, that the council of the *Siech* was assembled.

He pointed at Ayub.

"Too long has that man been strung up like a drawn ox."

The clamor of astonishment and fury that started up in the growing masses of Cossacks at hearing that a young warrior had ventured to call together a general council was stifled when Demid poured out on the drum, from a cloak that he carried under his left arm, a collection of glittering objects—gold goblets, jeweled buckles, strings of pearls and inlaid incense boxes.

"Here," he said, "is the value of more than four hundred sequins and the limit of time for payment of Ayub's debt is not yet passed."

A mutter, as of wind stirring dried leaves on the earth, drifted in from the outskirts of the gathering. The Cossacks who could not hear or see what was going on were asking their comrades who stood nearer what it was all about. The mutter dissolved into impatient shouts.

"What dog has called the council to see a debt paid? Demid—who the —— is Demid? Put a halter around him—string him up by the heels. Where are the cooks with their *kasha?* To purgatory with the cooks, we'll raid the dram-shops!"

This proposal drew forth a roar of approval. The warriors were hungry, their tempers frayed by the revelry of a few hours ago. Their hands sought their weapons, as several of the nearest strode toward Demid.

But when Boron, the *bogatyr*, stepped to the drum and began examining the spoil laid down by Ayub's comrade, the Cossacks paused respectfully.

"By all the saints," shouted Boron, flushing, "these things are mine! The vagabond from the Don has gone to my tower and stolen them."

Again the mutter as of wind brushing through the forests—men whispered to those far out in the crowd what had been said. Then silence.

"Aye, they were yours," said Demid.

Thrusting his left hand into the long pocket of his breeches he pulled forth shimmering strings of pearls, necklaces and bracelets, and finally a double handful of stones torn from their settings—rubies and emeralds that flashed as they bounced around on the drum-head. An emperor's ransom lay before the men of the *Siech.* No one had dreamed that Boron had so great a store of riches.

Looking closely at Demid they saw now that a cut ran across the back of one hand, that his shirt was torn open, that his forehead was bruised. When he forced his way into the tower of Boron, he had found it well-guarded by slaves, and among the slaves had been fair women of Cherkessia. Remembering this, he delved into the other pocket, using his left hand again. Upon the drum rolled anklets of inlaid ivory, tiny veils, sewn with pearls, pendants scented with musk, and toe-rings afire with diamonds. The head of the great drum was almost covered.

"Were these taken from your tower?" he asked gravely.

"As God is my witness," responded Boron incredulously, "they were, and——"

"This?"

Demid held out in the palm of his hand a signet ring, wherein glowed a single topaz, inlaid with the crest of one of the high officers of the Imperial City.

"Aye, and that. 'Twas taken from the hand of a Turkish vizier who fell to my sword at our last sally along the Black Sea."

"Aye, *bogatyr*, when half the men of your regiment laid down their Cossack lives."

Demid handed the signet ring to the *koshevoi.*

"Father," he said quickly to the chief, "I say that Boron lied when he accused Ayub. See, here, before you, is his wealth. He is not of the masterless ones, for he serves a master. And that is greed."

Hereat, the leader of the Cossacks stepped between the two men, looking first at Boron, then at Demid.

"Hard words! Demid, say all that is in your mind. *Ataman,* stay your hand until he has done. The time for the shedding of blood will come soon enough."

Boron, quivering with rage, dropped his hands to his sides and glanced at the sky in the east where the first streaks of dull red were showing.

"Ayub," said Demid slowly, "also spoke hard words against Boron. They were true words, as you see. Boron revenged himself by saying falsely that Ayub took his gold. While the old Cossack slept, the *bogatyr* put the six sequins in his pocket. The rest he carried around himself—for he lacked not of gold-pieces when he played at chess with me. So it is clear to me that Boron, having this"—he pointed to the drum-head—"sought the life of Ayub not because of a few sequins, but in revenge."

"And I say," added Boron calmly, "that one of us will sprinkle his blood in the earth before the day is here."

"Aye," assented Demid, "I claim the right of trial by combat."

He turned to the watching throng.

"Is it not fair, good sirs, that our swords should decide which of us is in the right?"

He had judged the temper of the Cossacks correctly. A shout of assent went up from the crowd: the *koshevoi,* who never had real authority except in time of war when his word was law, stepped back into the gathering, and a circle was cleared around the two swordsmen.

Ayub, forgetting his aches, tried to pull himself up higher on the spear to see the better, until his neighbors good-naturedly seized him and hoisted him to their shoulders.

For a moment after casting off the long leather coat that he had won from Demid, the *bogatyr* stood silent, the point of his simitar resting on the ground by his foot. It seemed as if he were listening for some sound other than the heavy breathing of men. At the end of the interval, he raised his weapon, saluted, and repeated quietly the customary phrase—

"To one of us life, to the other, death."

The violence of his anger had fallen from Boron; his eyes were bright and steady, the shadow of a smile on his lips. Demid had taken upon himself Ayub's quarrel; if the man from the Don should be cut down in the duel, Ayub's guilt would stand as before. Should Demid, by some chance, be the victor, his comrade would be free of all blame.

Such was the trial by combat in the *Siech.* Boron saw now how the stranger had planned for this, and in his salute there was a fleeting tribute to the courage of the man from the Don.

They stepped toward each other, and Boron began to attack at once, cutting swiftly at Demid's waist. He parried his adversary's answering stroke with a bare turn of his blade, forcing Demid to give ground.

The scimitars clashed and parted, the fine steel humming in the air; the boots of the swordsmen hardly made a sound, so swiftly did they shift position, wheeling around each other and darting in—two men who knew their weapons. They fought in the reckless style of the Moslems—both attacking at once, and leaping apart. Once their curved blades struck against flesh and bone, one or the other would be maimed. And yet Boron could not resist a *tour d'esprit*, to show off his brilliancy.

He sprang forward with a shout, locked his hilt against Demid's, and forced the right arm of the young Cossack high into the air. For a second the two stood, rigid—until Boron disengaged and stepped back swiftly, smiling as he did so. Demid's teeth gleamed under his mustache.

"Well done, *bogatyr!*" he cried, in acknowledgment.

Ayub noticed that after this Demid no longer gave ground. Pressing Boron back, until the scimitars flashed in the torchlight too swiftly for the eyes of the watchers to follow, he tried for the other's throat with his point. But Boron got home beneath Demid's sword.

And Ayub groaned, seeing that Demid was down on one knee, the muscles on the front of his right thigh severed by the sliding edge of the Zaporoghian's weapon.

"Boron! Well struck, Boron!"

The Cossacks in the throng shouted and tossed up their caps, and some glanced regretfully at Ayub, whose life hung on the *bogatyr's* next stroke. Demid was crippled.

Boron was not the man to forego an advantage. With a shout of triumph he sprang in, slashing with a full swing of the arm. But in the same instant Demid staggered erect, on his good leg. His scimitar darted forward and Boron never struck the blow he aimed, because his right shoulder was slashed half through the bone.

Stifling a groan, the tall Zaporoghian recovered his weapon with his left hand and set his teeth. Blood soaked the sleeve of his injured arm and splashed on the earth. Demid, poised on one foot, waited for his next move. "Come, *bogatyr*—I can not advance to you."

There was no middle course. The fight was to a finish, and Boron, weighing the chances, saw that his best move was to knock Demid off his balance. For the last time, he feinted and rushed against his foe. Demid went down.

But before he fell the young Cossack had got home with his point, and his scimitar was thrust through the heart of his adversary. The eyes of the *bogatyr* opened very wide and his hands fumbled at the hilt that projected from his ribs. His feet, planted firmly, still upheld his body.

Now the *koshevoi* stepped forward, saying that the fight was at an end, and, putting his arm about Boron, laid the dying man on the ground.

"*Hai*, sir brother," he observed, "your days with us are over; may your Cossack soul find the glory that you earned on earth. Surely the bandura players will sing your name!"

A little sadly he handed Demid the scimitar that he drew from the body of the first swordsman and most reckless warrior of the camp. A commotion that had been going on for some time attracted his attention. Into the ring from between the legs of the warriors crawled a thin Cossack, his wrists bound together, and his knees tightly secured by a sash. Two long sticks were thrust in the belt of the newcomer, who was gagged as well as bound.

Absorbed in the sword play, the Cossacks in the crowd had paid him little heed.

"The drummer!"

Some one in the crowd began to laugh, and others, who were nearest him looked at Demid curiously.

"Hide of the ——! Demid has bound him with his jeweled girdle, so that he could use the drum himself."

But the *koshevoi* frowned and took one of the torches in his hand to examine the trussed Cossack.

"Demid did not do this!"

"How not, Father?"

"Boron won this girdle from him three nights ago and has worn it since."

He ripped the gag from between the man's teeth.

"Who tied you up, you son of a pig?"

"Boron it was, Father. He fell on me in

my sleep and lugged me to the stable. I have been an hour crawling here."

While the warriors stared, puzzled, the *koshevoi* turned the body of Boron over with his foot, looking from the drawn face of the dead man to the signet ring that he still held in his hand, and from that to the disgruntled drummer. Then he glanced at the sunrise, flooding the sky behind the trees. He held up his baton for silence, and listened, as Boron had done, for a sound other than the breathing of men.

A shrewd man the *koshevoi* and no stranger to the wiles of his enemies. Only a month ago, good fortune alone had saved the camp from being surprized by the Turks. This was the hour in which an attack might well be made on the *Siech*, and in this hour the drummer whose duty it was to beat the alarm had been made helpless by the man who owned a signet ring of the Turks.

It was the habit of the *koshevoi* to act promptly. He put on his hat and drew himself up, and his shout was heard over the square.

"Form the regiments under the colonels! See that each man has powder in his flask, and that his pistols are loaded! Send patrols out toward the river on every side."

The muttering of the lines of bearded faces ceased as if by magic. The Father, their chieftain, had put on his *kalpak* and lifted his baton, as if the *Siech* were at war. Yet war had not been declared, nor were any foes within sight.

Crashing forth in the semi-darkness of the morning, the summons of the drum dispelled their doubts. The drummer, at a sign from the *koshevoi*, was beating the alarm with his sticks on the bull's hide, to arouse those who still slept. While men from each squad ran to the barracks for weapons that had been left behind—while the captains formed their companies and the colonels gathered around the chief, the veteran Cossack ordered that Ayub should be cut free of his bonds. This done, he turned to Demid thoughtfully.

"Young sir, you have ransomed Ayub with your sword. But surely you had hatred for Boron to accuse the famous knight in that fashion."

Taking off his cap—for the *koshevoi* now spoke not as the commander of a camp at peace but as a leader in war—Demid made answer:

"Father, when his blood was hot, when he waged the battle of the chess-board, he let fall a phrase used only by the Turks. Instead of 'checkmate' he cried '*shah ma'at*,' the king dies."

"So, it must be that he played the game with the Turks."

The chief raised his head and the doubt passed from his eyes as a warrior spurred a pony between the company lines and reined in sharply—Vladimir, of the river-watch. He was smiling and his eyes were bright.

"Father," he said quickly, "we have seen boats drawing in to the reeds, and in the boats are the white turbans of the sultan's *janisseries*. Well for the good Cossacks that they are armed and ready. There are many boats, coming to test the hearts of Cossackdom——"

"Colonels," the chief addressed those nearest him, "take your companies in column to the west side of the island. Hold the higher ground, above the rushes."

For the last time he looked at the ring in his hand, and cast it from him.

"It is an evil thing," he remarked quietly to Demid, "when a man sells himself to a master. My eyes are open now. Boron betrayed the position of the *Siech* the last time; in our raid upon the Black Sea he departed from us, going in among the Turks. He pointed out to them the new camp, and, by binding the drummer, he strove to delay our muster. *Hai*—he played with princes. But now the bandura players will be silent when his name is spoken."

His face lighted as he surveyed the two warriors standing helpless—Ayub too stiff and cramped to walk, and Demid on one leg—before him.

"You have done enough, Zaporoghians. We may not carry you with us to the combat. Abide here and lick your hurts, while we deal with the Moslems—thus!"

And he mounted a pony and wheeled away; wilfully heedless of Ayub's prayers to be taken along.

Demid looked at his friend.

"Do you bind up my cut, while I rub your joints."

A FULL day dawned on the almost deserted barracks. And the camp-followers, the Jews, the Armenians and the wine-merchants, standing on the mud wall beyond which they never came, listened to the discharge of musketry on the distant bank of the river, hearkening to the far-off shouting. Pleasure and excitement ran high among them, for the savage temper of the Zaporoghians was at an end. The warriors were fighting again, which meant that they would be good-humored again by night, and, if fortune decreed it so, owners of rich spoil.

So said the camp-followers. But, in the interval, they were staring at something unwonted. On the top of the drum glittered a mass of gold and jewels—apparent to the keen eyes of the hucksters. Beside the drum lay outstretched the body of one of the finest lords of the camp.

Moreover, and this puzzled the onlookers, two Cossacks, one tall and fat and the other young, were limping slowly out of the camp toward the river. While one moved with painful stiffness, the other hobbled beside him on a stick.

The warriors had their swords in their hands, and they were cursing their legs as they headed toward the sound of firing.

Slants on LIFE

by Bill Adams

Government by Idealism

I FOUND them all in a railway work-car. A bunch of common men. Thank God for common men. How little it matters who sits at Washington making laws to shape the destiny of America and all the world as long as there are just common men to love each other in a common way!

We talked for a long time—or rather, I fear, I talked for a long time. We were a crowd of comfortable sinners whose inward goodness I am quite sure would distress the old horned devil dreadfully. We may even have been so wicked as to smoke a few cigars, and even to use an occasional word of greater strength than light wines and beers, but we got along quite nicely. We found no fault with any government or any nation, or any man or thing, save such men and things as would endeavor to make of us something other than plain common human beings with desirous hearts for whatsoever place it is where lies the Great White Truth.

I often wish that governments were directed, instead of from pillared palaces and from white-collared necks, from the eager hearts of plain and honest ignorant men whose necks are dirty and whose backs are wet with honorable sweat. I am no Bolshevist, nor socialist, nor of any 'ism whatever. I am, and hope long to remain, one of my common crowd, and feeling thus would wish that we might some day see the soul of all true brotherhood awakened not alone, where it is now as always most in evidence amongst us of the common herd, but amongst those to whom is entrusted the shaping of the destiny of this unhappy world—unhappy for the reason that men will persist in letting go the best blessing given to them—that of plain and every-day trustful humanity, dressed in common clothing.

It is very nice to be alive, and dirty faced, and honest. To —— with all frills and fripperies and falseness that take us from the simplicity of mortal life.

God grant us honest toil, and hearts that aren't ashamed of poverty, and souls that are His own and made after His own molding.

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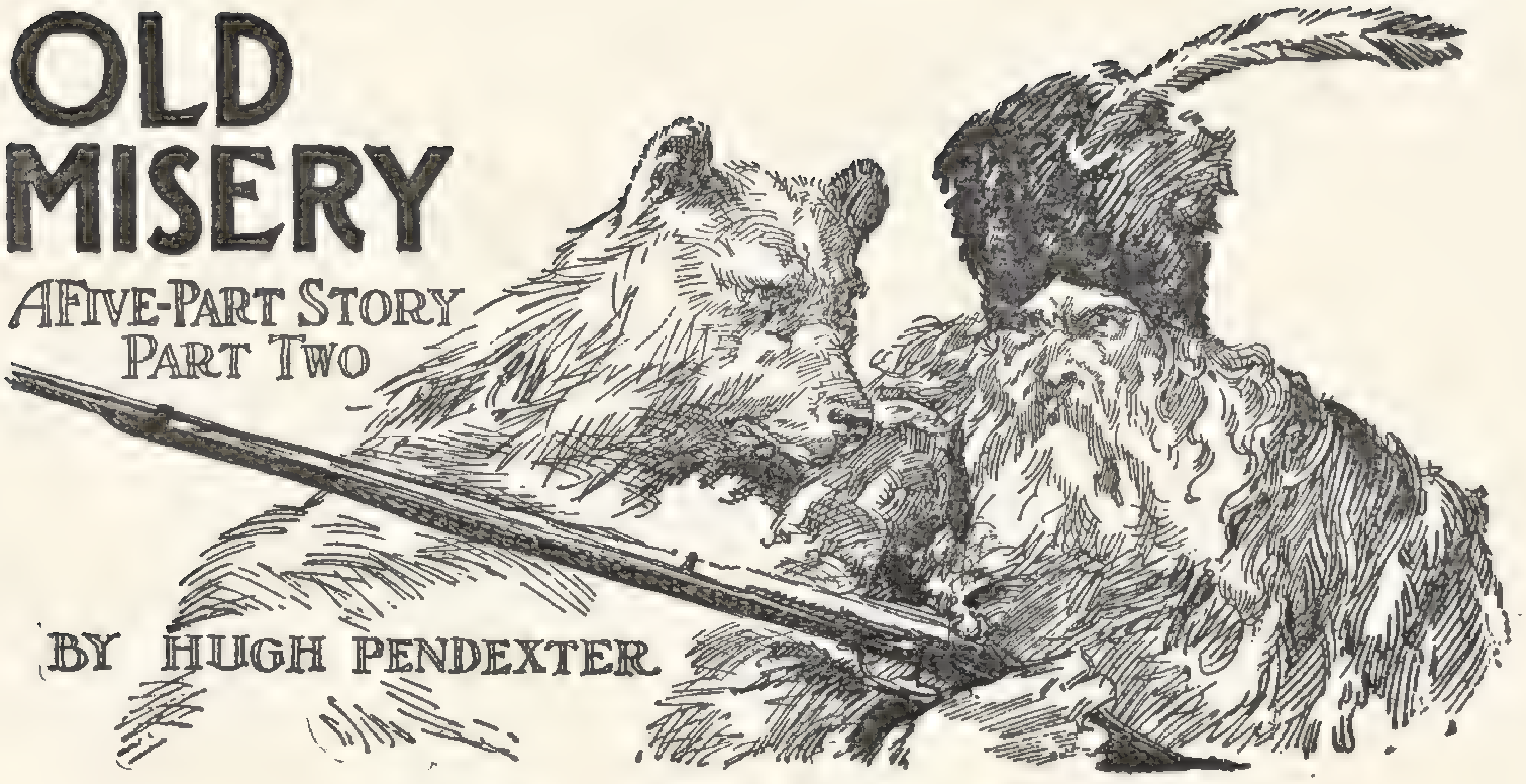
OLD MISERY

A FIVE-PART STORY
PART TWO

BY HUGH PENDEXTER



Author of "Red Autumn;" "Long Rifles," etc.

The first part of the story briefly retold in story form

GOD help me!" groaned Joseph Gilbert to Maria the monte dealer as he saw her sweep in his last dollar. "It was not my money I lost. I am a thief!"

The young Vermonter had lost fourteen hundred dollars belonging to friends in Coloma, a mining camp in southern California.

To Maria his was simply another ludicrous case. She was accustomed to seeing men losing other people's money in gambling-halls. In these flamboyant days of 1853, when the wild hilarity of the '49 gold rush had not yet checked itself, San Francisco saw many things that a more conventional time would have been shocked over.

The girl's laugh died out. Joaquin Murieta, Mexican bandit, and five masked men had entered the gambling-hall. On their heels came "Old Misery," the Man from the Mountains—Old Misery, who was the most expert knife-thrower in California.

In a twinkling Murieta had shot the lights out. In the darkness men grappled with each other helplessly. Gilbert, shaken and trembling, endeavored to escape; groping blindly, his hand found a window curtain, and he drew it back. Before he could stir, the bandits leaped through the window, each carrying a bag of gold.

In a moment Gilbert had also cleared the window-sill. As he landed on the ground his hand encountered a bag, dropped by the bandits. Concealing it under his coat, he fled.

When he reached his hotel he found the night's excitement had preceded him. There was a persistent rumor that Joaquin Murieta had been aided in his escape by a young greenhorn.

Inside, the lights on again, Old Misery faced the girl Maria.

"You ain't bad at heart, Maria," he said. "Just a trifle wild. Your grandpap won't lambast you again."

When he left he took her with him. Old Misery was accustomed to taking care of other people's troubles; this girl was going to be taken back home again.

The next morning Joseph Gilbert took the bull by the horns. In his pocket was a ticket to Sacramento. From there he would take the stage coach to Coloma. Afterward he would have to let fate take its course. If his friends decided to send him to jail for gambling away the money that they had entrusted to him, there was nothing he could do. In the bag he found three hundred dollars, which for the present, he felt entitled to use.

THE landing at Sacramento left Gilbert confused. Therefore it happened that he took the wrong stage coach, and as a consequence found himself bound for Nevada City. And opposite him sat Old Misery and the girl, Maria. He resigned himself to the situation; he was not anxious to reach Coloma.

In Nevada City Gilbert met Mr. Peters, the gambler exquisite. Talk concerning the raid of Joaquin Murieta and his fellows on the gambling-hall in San Francisco ran feverishly. It was being said that Murieta had been aided in his escape by a greenhorn Yankee. In desperation Gilbert confessed the whole affair to Peters.

According to Peters, there was only one thing for Gilbert to do: lay low until the thing had blown over. And after Peters had persuaded Old Misery, it was decided that Gilbert should seek refuge with the Mountain Man in his home in the foot-hills. Old Misery had finally been prevailed upon to accept the commission after his tame bear, Ben Williams, fawned upon the young man.

Just as Old Misery and Gilbert were riding out of Nevada City bound for the foot-hills, Manuel Vesquio, half-Chinese, half-Mexican, rode up behind them. Back of them they could catch the sound of shouting. Something was wrong.

Hurriedly the breed told them that excitement had broken out in the city and a posse was being formed. Why, he said he could only imagine.

"They're after me!" gasped Gilbert.

"Old Misery," copyright, 1923, by Hugh Pendexter

AS THE day wore on and there were no signs of pursuit the mountain man decided the breed had brought a false alarm, or else the posse had taken the wrong direction. They halted late in the afternoon at a deserted cabin in a deep ravine in the heart of big timber.

Above on the lofty, rocky wall immense sugar pines reared their magnificent tops, and on a dead limb of one of these perched a bald eagle, king of the feathered folk. He was staring into the sunset and perhaps down on the emerald floor of the Sacramento Valley, his favorite fishing-grounds. Old Misery pointed him out, but Gilbert was not sure he saw him. More intimate were the blue-jays. These at once discovered the campers and ventured close to obtain food.

"I like the little cusses," murmured the old mountain man as several of the pretty creatures lighted within a few feet of him and picked up crumbs of bread he scattered about.

His benign expression changed to a frown as the discordant croak of a raven sounded near by.

"Bill 'n me call that feller 'Death,' " he muttered, glancing toward the dark woods uneasily. "Never eats anything. You'll find him out where even a horned toad can't pick up a living. Have a chaw, Bill."

He tossed a piece of tobacco to his pet, who eagerly caught it in his mouth.

"That's what I like 'bout a bear. He's so —— human. Likes terbacker. Hi! There's another cuss that's 'most human. Bill calls 'em 'mountain men.' Hear him?"

Gilbert picked out the harsh, disagreeable voice of a crow; only it was different from the Eastern crow.

Old Misery reached the height of praise when he solemnly declared:

"That feller can go anywhere a mountain man can. He don't feel t' home below the four-thousand-foot level. When crossing the Cascades at seven thousand feet up I've seen 'em three thousand feet overhead, taking it as easy as a buck with three squaws. And, dern him! He's just like a jay. Wants to know everybody's business. Cunning's a jay, too. But he flies like a woodpecker, and is just as shy. He'll out-Injun any other bird in guarding against trouble. Always lights on a dead tree where he can look round afore gunning for grub in a live tree. Never forgets as lots of men do. Never gits careless."

Old Misery had brought bread and cooked meat, and they soon finished their supper. Gilbert felt he was out of the world as they lounged by the fire in the open. The mountain man lighted his pipe and leaned against the sleeping bear and told amazing stories of his colorful life.

As if it were a mere incident, he spoke of going as guide with General Ashley to the Upper Missouri in 1823, and in this connection he explained he had been with Pilcher at the mouth of the Bighorn in 1821. He briefly described his crossing to California with Jedediah Smith in 1826, and declared he was one of the survivors of the Mohave massacre on the Colorado when ten of the party were killed. In a sketchy manner, as though talking to entertain himself rather than to enlighten his companion, he reviewed the return trip with Smith in 1827, crossing the Sierra in the vicinity of the Stanislaus River.

Invariably he said:

"Me 'n Jed Smith," thereby giving Gilbert the impression he, not Smith, was in command of the expedition. Almost all of the old-time names dropping from his bearded lips were new to the Vermonter; just as some geographical points well known in the East were meaningless to Misery, who knew them only by colloquial, or their Indian, names.

After concluding the twenty-seven narrative he abruptly asked—

"What Winter you born in, younker?"

"In the Summer of thirty-one."

"Winter-count of thirty-one, huh? Makes you twenty-two now. And poor Jed Smith was only thirty-three when he was killed at the Cimarron. That bird we call 'Clarke's crow,' that's like a jay and a woodpecker, wouldn't 'a' got trapped as poor Jed did. He was only twenty-eight when I took him overland. Why, he was only two years older'n you when he went with me 'n Gineral Ashley to the Upper Missouri—but he l'arned fast."

"You've been out here quite a while," observed Gilbert.

"Uh-huh. Quite a while," muttered the mountain man. "Come here from the East, but it's so long ago seems if I always was out here." Then with a flash of heat: "Some folks in Frisco got together an outfit they call 'The Californy Pioneers.' Before you can belong you have to be able to brag 'bout coming out here in forty-nine—four years ago! I didn't *sabe* the rules of the game and 'lowed to take on with 'em. And, —— me, if they didn't say I was lying when I said I was here in twenty-six. Bill's dead right. It's time to snooze."

He preferred the open, lying against the bear. Gilbert succumbed to the house habit and spread his blankets inside the cabin. He was awakened in the morning by large gray squirrels scampering over the roof. He heard the crack of a rifle some distance from the camp and remembered Ching-a-ling's warning. In his haste to dress he lost time. As he was rolling his blankets he heard the rifle for the second time. When he burst through the doorway it was to behold Old Misery coming from the growth with a brace of quail. Bill Williams swung along at his heels.

Gilbert threw his blankets back into the cabin, hoping the mountain man had not detected his panic. A dusky grouse, the handsomest of its kind, flew up a few feet in front of the mountain man.

Old Misery called out:

"See that cock, younker? He's lit in a tree nigh here. S'pose you take Solid Comfort and pot him to go along with our breakfast. I'll be dressing the quail."

Gilbert was eager to make himself useful. In Vermont he had been considered a good bird-shot.

"He won't quit the tree when you fire at him," said the mountain man. "Just reload and shoot again."

He passed over his bullet-pouch and powder-horn.

"If he doesn't drop once I sight him it'll be because he's nailed to the limb," assured Gilbert.

Old Misery grinned and winked at Bill Williams.

Gilbert ran to the woods at the point where the grouse had entered. Almost at once he heard a dull booming note and knew the bird was directly ahead. With rifle ready and moving stealthily he crept forward. After a half a dozen steps the cry sounded on his left, and he shifted his course. But he had proceeded only a short distance when the call was repeated behind him. He turned back and reached an opening where he could see Old Misery. The mountain man was apparently waiting for him to shoot the bird. Gilbert held up three fingers to signify he almost located that many birds.

"Git 'em all," encouraged Old Misery. "Remember, they won't quit their perch. Take your time in reloading."

Gilbert waved his hand and advanced deeper into the timber. Now the booming call was close on his right, and he wheeled and cocked the rifle. Almost immediately it was answered from the left. As he faced in that direction it began reverberating deep in the woods. The plentitude of chances and the swift exchange of calls tended to confuse him. He turned about, then reversed his position; then decided to advance some distance into the growth. But the call ahead now sounded far off. And he halted and waited for a grouse to sound a cry closer at hand. While he was thus maneuvering and hesitating and getting nowhere Old Misery strolled to the edge of the timber and asked—

"What seems to be bothering you?"

"There's half a dozen of them in here," answered Gilbert.

"Fetch Solid Comfort here."

Gilbert went to him and surrendered the gun.

"Now look up that trunk thirty feet. See where the first branch j'ins?"

Gilbert tilted back his head and gazed sharply. He made out the indistinct figure of a bird perched on the limb and close to the trunk.

"It's one of them," he whispered. "Give me the gun."

"It's all of 'em," Old Misery informed him, still retaining the rifle. "Hear him? He's trying to dog you away."

There came dull rumbling far off to the right.

"This time of year he'll play that trick to keep you away from his mate. Sorter throws his voice all around to fool you. Bill Williams would be 'shamed of me if I shot him. Know any Yankee birds that can play that trick?"

Somewhat crestfallen, Gilbert walked back to the fire. The air was soothing with the aroma of the pines and spicy with the spruce scents. If he could but forget the betrayed trust he knew he would feel wonderfully exhilarated. As he took his dipper of coffee and one of the quails on a huge slice of bakery bread he decided he never before had been so hungry. He glanced at his watch, changed to coast time.

It was six o'clock; and he idly remarked—

"Folks back home have been up four hours."

"Good land! I've heard 'bout Yanks being early risers, but gitting up at two in the morning!" exclaimed Old Misery.

"At this time of year they get up at five. An hour later in Winter."

"Then what medicine have you got that tells you they got up this 'ticular morning at two?" sharply demanded the mountain man.

"But they didn't. Their time is three hours earlier than ours. That's what I meant."

Old Misery tossed the framework of a quail to Bill Williams and stared at the young man thoughtfully.

Finally he asked—

"You mean there's anything back East that's quicker'n we be out here?"

Gilbert was puzzled at first; then believed he understood, and explained:

"I was speaking of the difference in time. Of course when it's six o'clock here it's a bit over three hours later there; or a trifle past nine."

"Well, I'll be cussed!" gasped the mountain man. "Bill Williams, you hear that? Look here, younker, Bill 'n me took you along, thinking you was simple, not bad. We reckoned you'd made a fool of yourself like lots of young fellers do when they git away from home. But the one thing I won't stand for is a liar. 'Cording to your tell something can happen back East at nine o'clock, and—if our medicine was strong enough for us to know it the minute it happened—we could know 'bout it here at six o'clock, or three hours *afore* it happened."

Gilbert endeavored to explain how London saw the sun ahead of New England, and how Vermont saw the sun ahead of California. As he listened Old Misery's anger vanished, and he gazed pityingly on the young man.

After the explanation was finished the mountain man patiently asked—

"Then if a man was shot in London at one o'clock this afternoon we'd hear that gun crack—if our ears were medicine 'nough—'bout five o'clock this morning, or nigh on to eight hours afore it happened?"

Gilbert floundered about helplessly in a last endeavor to make it clear.

Old Misery sadly shook his head and confided to Bill Williams:

"You're right, Bill. We've got to give him a try. But he's *mahopa.* He don't show color."

Some one shouting down the ravine brought the two to their feet.

Gilbert cried—

"By Heavens, they've caught me!"

A figure could be glimpsed in the timber at the west end of the ravine.

"Into the woods behind the cabin! Stay there till I give you a call," ordered Old Misery.

And with his rifle over his arm he walked down the ravine, the bear lazily following him. Several men were now to be seen in the timber; and one rode clear, but reined in as his horse threatened to bolt. Old Misery halted.

The newcomer was Phelps of Grass Valley.

"Git that —— bear to one side so I can come up!" he called out.

"B'ars owned this country 'fore you ever was borned. My b'ar knows more'n you. And I don't like your talk. What you want up here?"

Phelps, now on the ground and holding his horse, apologized:

"I take it all back, Misery. I'm like my fool horse. I don't know much of nothing."

"We won't fight over that. But what you want?"

"How's diggings?" replied Phelps, and grinning broadly.

Other figures were now emerging from the open woods. Several pack-animals were in the procession, and had picks and shovels strapped on their loads.

Old Misery relaxed his watchful attitude and muttered:

"Miners, Bill. They wouldn't pack shovels along if they was chasing the young fool— Killed in the afternoon in London and known here afore it happened! Young cuss is *heyoka**— All right, Phelps. Just stick where you be till I put Bill Williams in the shack."

The men halted and waited for him to lead the bear to the cabin and close the ruin of a door on him.

To Gilbert in hiding the mountain man called out:

"Show yourself, 'Difference in Time.' Everything's all hunky."

Gilbert emerged from behind the cabin. Old Misery called out for the men to leave their pack-animals behind and advance. The miners swarmed up the trail.

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*Teton Dakota. A demented person; foolish.

The Georgia man was in the party and waving his hand, he yelled:

"We've caught you at it, Misery. Let it be same as usual; double-claim for you. Your discovery right. Choice of third claim for your young friend. We'll hold a meeting tonight and decide on the size of the claims. Now if you'll lead the way we'll proceed to locate."

Old Misery stroked his beard and grinned broadly and asked of the cabin:

"Hear that talk, Bill? Of course you're laffing."

Then to the prospectors:

"What give you boys the notion I'd struck pay dirt up here? You know I never fuss with gold till some one else has dug and cleaned it."

"Can't catch birds with that seed," good-naturedly replied Phelps.

And his companions laughed heartily, and several men ran back to remove picks and shovels from the packs.

"Can't fool us, Misery. You gave the game away when you was drunk and throwing knives at the Chinaman. Mebbe you don't remember giving him a double handful of gold. We looked it over. Never come from Deer Crick or the Yuba. It was sharp-edged 'stead of being smooth and worn like river gold."

"I see," mused Old Misery. "Smartest of us git caught sometimes, don't we? Well, boys, if you'll strike down through the timber to the first bench above the little crick you'll find color all right. I ain't saying how rich you'll find it. As for staking a claim you oughter know I never shovel dirt and rocks and paw round in mud. When I find free gold I take 'nough for whisky and terbacker, just as I shoot 'nough meat to eat and no more. If I want a claim for this young feller I'll find him one out of what you folks leave."

"But your gold wa'n't river gold," the Georgia man reminded him suspiciously.

"Mebbe I dug it out of cracks in a rich ledge. There's a ledge on this side of that bench. You know I ain't no miner. I sell meat, birds and animals to miners and towns. My pay is in gold. I have all kinds give me. You're marking the wrong tree, boys, but pitch in and tear up the ground."

Phelps eyed him cunningly and suggested:

"Perhaps we'd better stick close to you, Misery."

"Now you're talking on a pipe," eagerly agreed the mountain man. "Keep along with me and I'll sell you deer meat at seventy-five cents a pound after your grub runs out. And I'll lead you over some new country. Snake River country by the way of the Humboldts."

The Georgia man conferred with Phelps in whispers. More men came straggling from the timber.

With a chuckle Old Misery exclaimed:

"See 'em pile in! Reg'lar rush. You fellers better look smart or they'll stake out the whole bench."

This arrival of more prospectors caused a panic among the first on the scene. One of the newcomers, armed with pick and shovel, broke from his companion and raced down the slope and into the growth to where he knew he would find running water. The others quickly chased after him. Phelps' party witnessed this stampede with much alarm, and the group began disintegrating. Phelps and the Georgia man succumbed and made frantic haste to reach the bench.

Old Misery hastily packed up his belongings and released the bear and tossed out Gilbert's blanket-roll and carpet-bag and warned the young man:

"Stir your hoofs fast, younker. Those idiots will be chasing us 'way to camp if we don't lose 'em."

He took to the evergreens on the south side of the ravine, and Gilbert endeavored to keep at his heels. But the mountain man's legs seemed to be all springs, and he glided up the slope and over the slippery brown carpet of pine needles with a rapidity the Easterner could not equal. Near the top of the ridge and after they had passed a narrow pack-horse trail the mountain man finally halted and waited for Gilbert to come up.

With the sweat streaming down his face Gilbert approached to within a rod of his companion when he was halted by the sudden appearance of a rifle barrel protruding from the bushes back of Old Misery and by a hoarse voice commanding:

"Drop that gun and stick up your hands, old man. Keep that —— bear quiet if you want to live."

Without displaying any agitation and without moving his head, Old Misery obeyed.

The unseen next commanded—

"You, young feller, come close, and up with your paws."

Gilbert nervously did as told.

"Ain't you 'Reelfoot' Williams?" asked Old Misery without raising his voice.

"None of your —— business! I want what's left of that gold you was making so free with in Nevada City two nights ago."

"Welcome to anything I've got 'cept my pipe and gun. Thought I knew the voice. 'Cording to my young friend here if this was happening in London over the ocean the folks in Frisco—if their hearing was keen 'nough—would know 'bout it more'n seven hours afore it happened."

"Shut up!" growled Reelfoot Williams, a pest of the northern trails but a minor offender compared with Joaquin Murieta.

He stepped from the bushes, his masked face watching Gilbert as he stood behind the mountain man. The latter spoke sharply to the bear, and Bill Williams lay down.

"There's a hundred or more miners down the slope, Reelfoot," lazily warned Old Misery. "If they sight you this mountain air will be filled with lead. And I don't want the b'ar hurt. You'd better straddle your hoss and ride away."

"I'll risk stopping long enough to go through your clothes. Young feller, you face down the ridge. Old man, if you make a move my knife will stop it."

"Go ahead, but work sharp. My arms is gitting tired. In the inside pocket of my shirt."

Leaning his rifle against a tree and holding his knife in his right hand, the point against his victim's back, the bandit slipped his left arm around the old man's waist and thrust his hand into the pocket of the hunting-shirt.

"——! Not very hefty," he growled as he fished out a small bag.

"Got rid of most of it. But better take a peek at what's on top."

Suspecting some ruse, yet curious, the bandit loosened the string and opened the bag. After a quick glance the bandit muttered an oath and dropped the bag on the ground.

"So that's it, eh?" he growled. "Never dreamed of it. No, thank you. Not any more for me. I've had enough. That's one game I won't buck. Stand just as you are for a bit."

And he picked up his rifle and backed through the bushes.

Then came the sound of hoofs, and Old Misery sighed in relief and dropped his arms and said:

"All right, younker. Take it easy. He's vamosed."

"He robbed you!" gasped Gilbert as he faced about.

"No. Just took a peek at my medicine and remembered he had business over the ridge. Riding like —— by this time."

He picked up the bag and drew from it a monte card and stared at it thoughtfully.

"First time I ever let any one else see it," he mused. "You might as well look."

Across the face of the card was scrawled—

JOAQUIN—*Amigo*

"The man——"

"Same cuss," sighed Old Misery, as he took the card and tore it into bits. "Pulled him out the San Joaquin River with a rope in high water. Looked like a rat when he got ashore. Not till he caught his hoss and rode off did he tell me he was Murieta. After you've saved a man's worthless life it's hard to turn round and kill him. But Bill 'n' me talked it over afterward and decided that's how it would have to be if we met up with him again. Tried to git him in Frisco, but Scar-Faced Luis dropped back and held me up. I saved his life. You helped him to bust loose from the El Dorado. Funny. Both helped him out of a bad fix."

"But the card?"

"Few days after I roped him out the river a man came to me and give me the card and rode off. I'll spoil his hide the next chance I git." Then with a chuckle: "Only Bill 'n' me ain't sure 'bout seeing him first. That dif'rence in time might work against me. I might try to shoot him in the afternoon, with him knowing 'bout it several hours aforehand; then he'd git his lead home first. Mebbe you saw him afore you really saw him, and helped him from the El Dorado afore he went into that place."

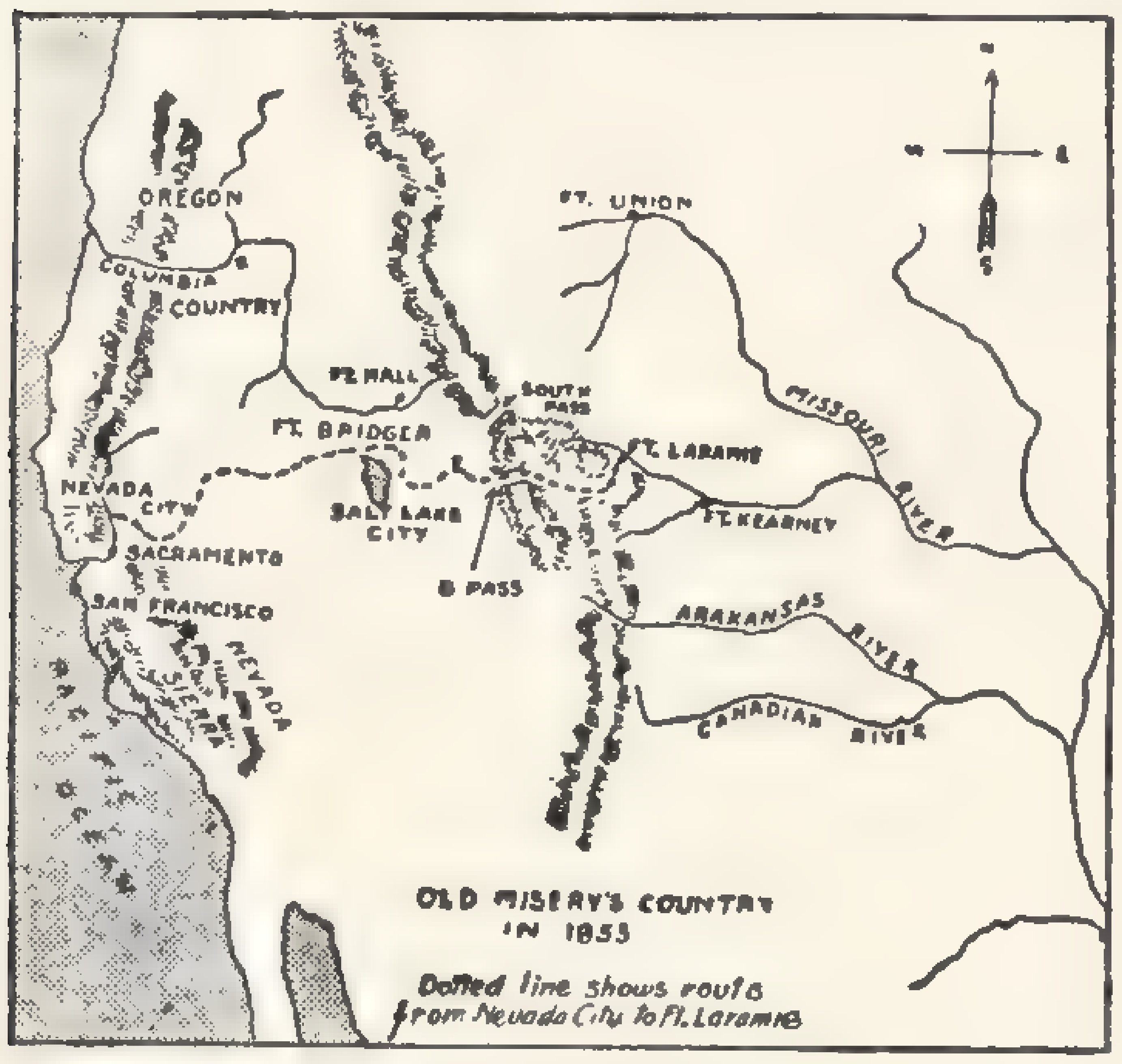
CHAPTER IV

THE HIDDEN VALLEY

THEY had climbed high above the valley of the Sacramento and its joyous freshness, but nowhere could there be a richer green than here among the endless growths interspersed with heavily grassed hollows. Bird life was abundant. The jays, with harsh and challenging cries, were feeding on seeds from the big pine cones. Close by, only more sedately, the mountain-chickadee and the demure titmouse hunted for food. The deep blue overhead would remain unspotted by clouds for months.

Gilbert's feeling of aloofness from the world was cumulative; and now as he approached the entrance of a hidden valley without suspecting its existence he lost perspective, and San Francisco was as far away as was Vermont. There was an unreality blurring all that had happened down in the lowlands.

With a brisk step Old Misery led the way through a stately stand of pines, so clean of ground-growth that wagons could pass without hindrance, and halted so that his companion might look upon the hidden camp. The valley extended nearly east and west between ridges covered with ancient trees. Bill Williams hurried to an overhanging shelf of rock and lay down on a bed of dry grass. The two men remained a minute and in silence surveyed what to the younger was a strange scene.



A young bear, of the size of one in Nevada City, strained at his slender chain in an attempt to assail Mr. Williams. Old Misery advanced and released the prisoner, who gallantly attacked the veteran. Bill was in no mood to be bothered, and with one sweep of his huge paw he shot the six hundred pounds of merry-maker out from under the ledge. A smaller bear, a female, ran to Old Misery and stood up like a child to be petted. Three panther kittens and three wolf pups occupied two cages. To accommodate the human members of the little community were several log cabins strung along the southern slope. Straight ahead reared a blue-white peak of the Sierra.

Accompanied by the young bear, Old Misery led the way to the first cabin and directed:

"Heave your fixings inside and come along and git 'quainted. I always sleep in the open till the rains git too cold. So you'll have the roof to yourself."

Gilbert was returning from the cabin when the girl Maria ran from the second cabin, gladly crying:

"*Señor Comandante*, it is ver' good for the heart to see your kind face again! Luck in your face, Señor Gilbert! Is it not? *Sí.*"

"No thanks to you he ain't straightening out a coil of rope, you young streak of scarlet," growled the mountain man, yet content to have her cling to his fringed arm and dance sidewise so she could peer up into his face. "You young female hellion, what you mean by sneaking off and raising hob at the bay for? Mebbe your granddad had good reason for larruping you."

She kept up her dancing step and turned her laughing face toward Gilbert. She seemed to find much amusement in the young man's grave countenance. And, in truth, this meeting with the girl was shattering the unreality of the world down the big valley and was bringing San Francisco very close. He gave her a civil greeting, but his voice sounded strained. She laughed delightedly and jumped up and pecked at Old Misery's bearded face and then ran into the second cabin.

"She's a caution," mumbled the mountain man. "But don't mean no more harm then some wild thing that scratches and draws blood in play. Here comes her grandpap."

From the dark doorway came a little old Mexican of withered visage, his stunted stature made grotesque by the enormous black hat. Gilbert could only think of the gnomes who beguiled poor Rip into carrying the liquor up the mountainside. The old man wore a bright-colored serape over his left shoulder and had much silver up and down the outside of the slashed trousers. In a red sash was a silver-handled bowie-knife.

He peered up at them from under the brim of his big hat, bowed low and in Spanish said:

"*Señor Comandante*, my poor eyes already feel better now you are back home. I have returned thanks to Our Lady for the return of my wretched granddaughter. You bring a stranger with you. I can not see him well, but I think he is a young man."

"He is a young man, Don Miguel, and not very wise. He is in trouble for helping Joaquin Murieta escape from a gambling-place in San Francisco."

"Ah-h! He must be a very good young man, *Señor Comandante*. Surely he is a very wise young man to have helped the Great One!"

And old Miguel clawed Gilbert's arm with what was meant to be a caress.

"Alas, that the good God should have denied me such a grandson and sent me a wayward girl!"

To Gilbert the mountain man explained:

"Don Miguel. He won't talk to any one but me and this wild-cat hanging on my arm. He's 'most blind. Wicked old dog in his day. Rode with men long since shot or hung. Come up here to hide, like an old wolf lapping his wounds, two years ago. He's kind to the animals and never quits this holler."

To Miguel he advised—

"You better go inside as the sun will hurt your eyes."

"The sun!" mumbled the old man, turning back to the cabin. "No friend of mine. We rode by night when the world was black, or when the Fair Lady held a candle in the sky. But the sun—it was made for fools. Give the moon for lovers and those who had need to ride long and hard."

He was still muttering as he disappeared through the dark doorway.

As Old Misery turned away Gilbert asked—

"Who has the third cabin?"

"Two derned fools," replied Old Misery. "If it wa'n't for that they'd be good fellers. Out prospecting some'ers. Think of men grubbing among rocks and digging in dirt, their eyes looking at the ground, when all they have to do is to take it easy and watch the sky and them mountains yonder!"

And he turned and stared like a mystic at the rocky crest of the mighty Sierra.

After a pause he continued:

"My animals have more sense. Birds have more sense. They don't waller in rivers and sluice mud into the Yuba till they smother the bars lower down, like Swiss Bar was wiped out above Marysville. Look at that fool girl bear. She gits more fun out of life than Weymouth Mass and Sailor Ben does. See Bill Williams taking his rest like a sensible man. Then think of them *keyoka* men we left scrambling and sweating to stake out claims on that bench down below. Them young wolves are tame as dog-pups because they have 'nough to eat. Same with the panther kittens. 'Nough in the world for all of us to eat, but some cusses want to git more'n they ever can eat. That means other folks must go hungry. That brings on fighting, and then ——'s to pay. How's 'Merica, Maria?"

"Ver' sad, *caballero*," she gravely replied. "He looks at the mountains, or down toward the Sacramento all the time. I stand before his eyes. He does not see me."

"S'pose we have a powwow with him," mumbled Old Misery, turning in behind the third cabin and climbing the slope.

For Gilbert's benefit he explained:

"Some Injuns caught him in a trap. They was going to *eat* him. I bought the old cuss with some wolf-skins. They're keen to have wolf-skin leggings as it's good medicine. I'm beginning to think he don't thank me for keeping him out of an Injun stomach. He's one of the things that never takes to civ'lization. Wants to wander and see things and places!"

He led the way into a natural little clearing high up the slope and halted before a large bald eagle fastened by a stout length of rawhide around one leg. The prisoner ceased striking his strong, hooked bill at the tether as the three came up, and turned his inscrutable eyes toward the golden west. His head and tail were white, the rest of his plumage being a brownish-black. As Gilbert looked at the proud captive he could only think of Old Misery with his white beard and frosty eyes. The mountain man imitated an elk's whistle. The bird remained immovable.

Old Misery plucked at his beard and mused:

"You're worth fifty dollars, delivered in Nevada City, partner. But that's a —— of a price to take for selling the only bird that ever got his picter on the 'Merican dollar! Lawd! What a come-down! Flying round at the top of the sky, then to be catched by Injuns and be hitched by one leg down in this hole! Much like I'd feel if they took me back East and let on I must always stay in one place! Maria, you fetch a heavy blanket—sudden."

The girl bounded down the slope and vanished in the growth. Soon she was reappearing and waving a thick blanket. Old Misery took the blanket and threw it over the eagle and closed in, holding the bird despite its frantic endeavors and calling for Gilbert to take the knife from his belt and cut the cord.

Gilbert drew the long knife from the mountain man's worn belt and started to sever the rawhide a foot from the leg.

"Don't leave any on the leg," bellowed Old Misery. "Cut the knot! Hi! You'll chop his leg off! Stand back. You streak of scarlet, show your blood with that knife."

The girl seized the knife from Gilbert's inexperienced hand and knicked the knot with lightning precision. Old Misery leaped back, snatching the blanket away. For a moment the bird appeared to be confused; then he shot like a bolt into the air and circled higher and higher.

"Go it, you 'Merican-dollar eagle!" hoarsely bawled the mountain man. "Climb to Kingdom Come to make sure you ain't asleep and having a Hawk dream. There he goes!"

And the eagle ceased his spirals and swept away toward the gold and emerald valley of the Sacramento.

"*Señor Comandante* give wings to feefty dollars," said Maria to Gilbert.

Old Misery gazed at her in silence for a moment, then exploded—

"And you'd sell a man for that price."

She laughed lazily and glanced at Gilbert through half-closed eyes and danced ahead of them down the slope and to the cabins.

"If she liked the man, no matter how low-down he was, she wouldn't sell him for all the gold in Californy," amended the mountain man as he and Gilbert more sedately descended to the valley.

Each cabin cooked and ate by itself. Old Misery brought deer meat from a cool little pocket under a ledge, whence issued a tiny stream of ice-cold water. Gilbert promptly offered to prepare the food.

The mountain man hesitated and explained—

"I ain't fond of squaw work, but I'm mortal hungry after climbing 'way up here."

"I'm not entirely a fool," Gilbert earnestly assured him. "Really I can cook after a fashion. If that's an oven I think I can make some fair bread."

He pointed to a Dutch oven.

"Saleratus powder's in the cabin. Try your luck," consented Old Misery. "I'll travel a bit and git the kinks out my legs."

He took his rifle and wandered into the timber back of the cabin.

A batch of bread was soon mixed and set to baking. When it was nearly done the steaks were skilfully broiled and coffee prepared.

Then the cook raised his voice in a loud—

"Hoo-ooh!"

Bill Williams woke up and ambled forward, sniffing the air. Old Misery stepped into view and yelled for the bear to lie down. His sudden appearance suggested to Gilbert he had been close by all the time.

"Best bread I ever sunk a tooth into 'cept what I bake myself," he mumbled as he filled his mouth. "Maria has tried to cook for me, but she's too fond of mixing in red peppers. Wolves won't eat a Mexican, his hide's so peppery from eating bitey stuff."

After he had demonstrated what one meant by referring to a "mountain man's" appetite he fed the bear, gave him a chew of tobacco for dessert and lighted his pipe. Gilbert went to the cabin and procured a book from his bag, returned to the fire and replenished it and endeavored to read. But his mind was brooding over his troubles, and he closed the book with a sigh.

"S'pose those Coloma men are still waiting for you to show up," Old Misery suddenly remarked.

"It's —— to think of it, and I can't think of anything else," groaned Gilbert. "I must get to mining. I must find enough gold to make up what I lost."

"Some greenhorns do strike it rich," reflected the mountain man. "But mighty few. In the old days of forty-eight and forty-nine, when they dug gold from the cracks in the rocks, and butcher-knives went up to thirty dollars apiece, and I was selling teeny iron tacks for their weight in gold, 'most every one out here was a greenhorn at mining. But they ain't digging it out of cracks in a ledge now; and they're building lodges of brick and stone and don't need tacks to fasten cloth over a frame of poles.

"If you kept busy prospecting for yourself for the next year you might make four hundred dollars. That is, if you was fair-to-middling lucky for a greenhorn. But first you'd have to find a claim that would pay eight or ten dollars a day. You'd work it out in two or three weeks. Then you'd drift to find another. You'd have to buy a mule. You'd always be buying grub. You'd use up lots of time hunting for pay-diggings that no one was on, and you'd have to be within reach of a store. Mebbe four hundred is putting it too high."

"Good Heavens! If I cleared only that much it would take me four or five years to make up what I—stole," cried Gilbert, nonplused at such dire prophecy.

"To make up what you got to fooling with. You didn't mean to steal it," corrected the mountain man. "You can stay along with me, and if we suit one t'other I'll give you five dollars a day. Mebbe I can find a likely-looking bit of diggings where you can make it faster for a couple of weeks."

"But if you found it, it would be yours to work," said Gilbert.

"Why should I break my old back digging in the ground? I ain't no prairie dog. Or git rheumatiz by standing up to my middle in icy water? What would I do with it if I dug it? I ain't 'going back home in the Spring,' as Weymouth Mass and Pretty Soon Jim and a lot more keep yapping about. I don't want a fine house. I don't like houses. They hamper a man. I like to wander and see what's on t'other side the mountain. And there's always some new mountain to coax me along. Almighty must 'a' wanted folks to prowl round 'em, else why did He make 'em?

"They never was built up just for b'ars and eagles to look at. And how can a man wander if he's tied to a house; or carries along a mule-load of gold? 'Merica, my eagle, was hitched by a stout rawhide. Men are hitched to a spot by what they own. Thank God I ain't hitched. I'm free of foot. I *have* to pack lead 'n' powder and some terbaccer. When I first got out here, when I was a younker, the Injuns showed me how to dress skins. So I git my clothes with my rifle. No one on earth owns a better country then I do, or has more to eat and more time to sleep.

"'Course you've got to save and scrimp and pay back what you lost gambling. Derned if that streak of scarlet didn't git you into a fine mess of trouble at the bay!"

"I can't blame her. I shouldn't have done it," said Gilbert, bowing his head.

"That's what they say when they lose. But heads are high and feeling mighty smart and pert when they win. You know, I've seen old mountain men swear off drinking whisky when their heads was aching powerful bad. After the ache was gone they'd sort of change their idees and walk five hundred miles to find a bar and make the eagle scream. But if you're soured for good on gambling your losing that money won you a mighty big pot."

"Stole it and gambled it away," miserably reflected Gilbert.

"That way, if it makes you feel better. But if you'd broke the bank we'd heard mighty little 'bout stealing. What's that book?"

Gilbert listlessly replied:

" 'The Three Guardsmen.' Written by a Frenchman."

"Huh!" snorted the mountain man. "Won't pan out much. I've knowed lots of big mountain men who was French. They have mighty neat fighting ways with Injuns. But a cuss that'll spend time writing a lot of lies can't weigh much . . . What's it 'bout?"

Two hours later, his eyes smarting and his throat hoarse and sore, Gilbert insisted he could no longer pursue the adventures of the immortal D'Artagnan.

Old Misery, who had assiduously fed dry twigs to the fire to afford light, rubbed his head as if emerging from a deep sleep and exclaimed:

"For —— sake! But ain't he a young hellion? And them three pards of his! Younker, the man who writ them lies wa'n't no common Frenchman. He must 'a' been an old mountain man in his day. Every squaw crazy over 'em! It ain't no book for Maria to read. Too free 'n easy. But we'll finish it in a night or two if it busts a gut."

MORNING came with sprightly assurance to the valley. When Gilbert turned out of the cabin it was to find Old Misery was gone. His blankets hung on the limb of a tree. The fire showed the mountain man had eaten his breakfast. Gilbert prepared his food and ate slowly, his eyes on the second cabin, and hoping the girl Maria would join him.

Old Miguel came to the door and sat on

the sill-log, his hat pulled well forward to shield his eyes from the radiance poured down the valley from the sun balanced on the crest of the Sierra. Depressed and lonely, Gilbert slowly approached the huddled figure, thinking the girl might appear.

Miguel heard the cautious step, and his claw of a hand flew to his belt, and the heavy knife was poised over his head, and he was snarling:

"Halt! Who is?"

"Gilbert. The greenhorn," hurriedly answered Gilbert.

The knife was thrust under the sash, and old Miguel was erect, worrying his eyes by removing his hat and bowing low.

"*Mi compadre* is welcome," he slowly said in English. "Gran' *caballero*. My young brother. I salute him who helped the Great One."

And with another flourish he sank back on the log and resumed his hat.

To be treated with such respect was most pleasing although it included the conviction he was hand in glove with Joaquin Murieta. Ambition contains many planes, and the Vermonter was well pleased for the time to be ranked as the friend of a bandit and the object of a broken-down outlaw's respect. So he did not disclaim any felonious intention in showing Murieta the hidden window. Instead he squatted before the Mexican and began asking questions.

Old Miguel answered as best he could, sometimes speaking in Spanish when his English failed. Gilbert did not ask for the girl, the one thing he wished to learn, but in time Miguel informed him she had gone away early in the morning with the mountain man. When would she be back? The good God knew. But who else? One knew when the last snow left the peaks of the Sierra Nevada, when the rains would come and the wild geese and ducks would return from the far north. But as to knowing what one inspired by the Satan would do—*quien sabe?*

About mid-day, however, and while Gilbert was broiling extra steaks on the chance Old Misery would be returning, the two came back. The girl ran to her cabin; the mountain man came to the fire and nodded approvingly to find dinner all but ready. He offered no explanation of his absence, and Gilbert was too wise to ask. The girl reappeared after they had eaten and fed the panther kittens and the wolf pups. Old Misery reserved the bears for his own attention. He had finished with his pets when his attention was attracted by Bill Williams pointing his nose down the valley and staring with all his little eyes.

The mountain man gave a sharp, quick glance and was commanding Gilbert:

"Into the woods behind your cabin. Don't show up 'less I call. If you're to hoof it the girl will show you the way."

Then he whistled like an elk, and Maria suddenly emerged from her cabin. In a panic Gilbert ran into the pines.

Old Misery gave the girl a signal, and she moved with gliding step to the rear of her cabin and sat down. The mountain man then spoke to Bill Williams, and with the bear behind him hurriedly walked down the valley toward the grove that masked the entrance. As he advanced he caught the hubbub of voices.

He came to a halt and dropped his rifle in the hollow of his left arm. Several men broke through the timber. Then came some pack-animals. Old Misery swore in his beard and eyed them in deep disgust. They were the same men who had overtaken him in the ravine below. He turned toward the cabins and lifted a hand high above his head and almost at once was answered by a shrill call.

Relaxing, he turned back to face the newcomers. Phelps and the Georgia man, mounted, were in the lead. The horses tried to bolt on smelling the bear and the riders had to dismount to hold them.

The Georgia man wrathfully cried—

"Take that —— bear back!"

"Keep your hoss-flesh back till we've had a powwow. Bill here is fond of hoss-flesh."

"If he comes at my hoss I'll plug him," warned the Georgia man.

"And I'll cut your throat for doing it!" roared the mountain man.

"Easy, Misery. No hard feelings. No harm meant," spoke up Phelps, who was well acquainted with the mountain man's temper.

Over his shoulder he called out—

"You fellows take your mules and our horses back to that patch of feed below the timber." Then to the mountain man—

"We've tracked you, Misery."

"This holler's mine," rumbled Old Misery. "I ain't honing for company."

"It's your hollow, but when it comes to hunting gold, gold has the right of way," Phelps amiably replied. "But I'll do the talking for the crowd. No need for them to come streaming in yet. We're still curious about that gold you was tossing round in Nevada City. It wa'n't scale gold from the Yuba ridges. It wa'n't smooth and round and worn, neither."

"Well, powwow, then you folks can hunt for gold all you want to so long as you don't trouble my animals," replied Old Misery. "And a blind squirrel can pack all the gold you find to Nevada City in one eye."

"We'll keep the hosses and mules in the lower opening and make our camp there till we've staked claims. As to not finding gold we don't agree with you," said Phelps with a laugh. "This place is your home. You fetched some likely-looking gold to Nevada City. It wa'n't river gold. I'm enough of a ledge man to know you've struck a rich lode. Take your double claim and don't begrudge us our share."

"If I have any gold I found it. S'pose you find your share. This holler is only part of my home. Rest of it stretches the whole length of the Rocky Mountains and the Sierra, and laps over into the Coast Range. I know where you can shovel gold out by the cartload, but not here in Grass Holler. I know where there's loads of silver. Three years ago I was with miners over the ridge in Carson Valley. They went from this side to nose round for gold. And there's a mountain of silver that waits for 'em who likes it."

Phelps continued to laugh, and replied:

"Nice wild-goose chase you'd send us on. Nice one you sent us on down below."

"Told you you'd find color. If you panned any dirt you found it."

"Well, that's so. Pretty strong color, too. But the bench once was an ancient river bed. Gold all worn and smooth. We're after that sharp-edged stuff you gave the Chinaman."

" 'Course you are," agreed Old Misery. "Don't blame you a bit. And I'll give you a couple pounds of it if you'll stand against the cabin and let me heave knives at you as I did that long-tailed cuss. But I can't have Grass Holler overrun for nothing. You name four or five men to come in here and prospect. When they find what 'pears to be pay-dirt, or rich ledge, t'others can come in and locate, and I'll move on. I'll have Bill Williams keep to his hole under the overhanging ledge and the men must keep clear of him. T'other bears are only cubs. One tied up is six months and past and has a dangerous mouth, but he don't mean no more harm'n a kitten. T'other one ain't hardly got her teeth yet."

"You talk reasonable," admitted Phelps. "And you're either bluffing, or it's another wild-goose chase. I'll go back and talk with the boys."

Old Misery walked back to his cabin and ordered Bill Williams under the ledge and fastened a stout chain to a hind leg. The bear did not like it and said as much.

"Now, Bill, be sensible," pleaded the mountain man. "It's good medicine for you. It won't be for long."

He called for Gilbert to show himself. Maria entered her cabin as the young man emerged from the pines.

"Only the same parcel of gold-hunters that chased us down below," Old Misery told him. "Bigger nuisance then a band of hungry Injuns. They think I've got a gold mine up here. Them clothes you're wearing make you stand out like Lassen's Butte. We'll have to see if Maria can't fix over one of my new suits of buckskins."

Phelps soon came up the valley alone and stared curiously at the cabins and animals. He announced that a committee of five would be named and the valley prospected on the morrow.

He recognized Gilbert and with a broad grin asked—

"Had any chance to use that magnet or telescope yet?"

"You know I threw all that truck away. I'm working for Old Misery. He says day-wages are better than hunting for gold."

Phelps' brown face puckered thoughtfully as he slowly agreed:

"Much better. I happened to strike it rich down in Grass Valley. Pure accident. Most prospectors are like Weymouth Mass—always drifting, always hunting. Even if they find ounce-diggings they won't stick. Next place is bound to be better and richer. Always moving around and hunting for something better."

"Weymouth is round here now," Old Misery informed them. "Fetched Sailor Ben up to sober him off. If he can keep Ben sober he'll find a heap of gold. But it takes Ben so long to git over a spree that by the time he's ready to prove his luck he's full-cocked to git drunk again. Weymouth says he won't try him after this season. Think of the medicine in that salt-water cuss just going to waste!"

"Weymouth up here?" mused Phelps, his eyes narrowing. "He's been out here three years, always worked hard, never helled around any, and he never made better than grub and tobacco. Now he has a notion there's gold close by this little valley."

And he stared sharply at the mountain man's expressionless face.

"Knowing Weymouth as I do, and knowing the first thing he'd do on a New England farm would be to try a pan of dirt, I'd bet a full-grown grizzly that he's panned every bit of loose soil he can find in and round this holler," was the prompt reply. "He was up here most of last season. Mebbe he struck it rich then. If he's a lucky cuss to foller you'll soon see him. Your five men can dog him round. No knowing when Ben's medicine may begin working."

"He's —— unlucky," growled Phelps, frowning. "Up here last season, eh? The boys will lose their appetite for this place when I tell them Weymouth has had the run of the place. What say to dropping into our camp tonight? Fetch young Ounce-Diggings here along. If Weymouth and the sailor show up, fetch them along!"

Old Misery readily accepted the invitation, but warned that no liquor was to be given Sailor Ben.

As Phelps was turning back to rejoin his companions the mountain man inquired:

"Any talk from down country? Or did you keep too close to our heels to hear it?"

"Feller making for the Truckee River road said Murieta was raising —— again. Six dead men found where he'd left them on his way to San Joaquin Valley. Folks at the bay stirred up worse'n ever and offering more money for his head and Three-Finger Jack's crippled hand. The El Dorado alone offers a thousand for either of the pair. They hope to git the young Englishman that escaped from the hall with Murieta. They say he fetched in the guns for the band. Door-tender remembers him as he's the only one who didn't have any arms when he entered the place.

"Men are hunting for suspects up this way and down to Stockton and Mariposa. Fast as they find a man that answers the description he'll be taken to the bay and the door-tender will look him over. Folks at the bay now think he separated from Murieta after they went through the winder. People saw the Mexicans running up the street and swear he wasn't with them. Between you 'n' me he come north. If he was going Stockton or Mariposa way he'd kept along with the band. He's either up this way or laying low in Frisco. Others think it, too. They've finished with Sacramento and are combing Marysville by this time. But come down to camp and we'll have some fun."

"I'll be there with my scalp-shirt on. Tell the boys meat's fifty cents a pound when their grub runs out. I won't be harsh with 'em."

"Harsh, ——! If we stay around here long enough you'll make more than the whole of us will."

"I done that when there was more folks at Selby's Bar then there was at Caldwell's store, now Nevada City," was Old Misery's parting rejoinder.

The mountain man made the rounds of his camp, inspecting his pets, and then took Bill Williams for a stroll through the timber on the north slope. Gilbert, not being invited, remained sprawled out by the Dutch oven, knowing he should feel very guilty instead of enjoying the glory of the sunset.

Maria came with her smooth, gliding step, slim brown hands resting on her hips, her head tilted and her red lips smiling. She halted and stared down at him. He crawled to his feet and bowed, his face flushing as he suspected amusement in her slumbrous gaze.

"He has the gran' manner. Ver' like a beeg *caballero*. I salute you, Señor Gilbert."

He gestured for her to be seated on the grass and remarked—

"You've lived here some time before going to San Francisco?"

She shrugged her shoulders and from her blouse produced a small cigar and lighted it with a coal from the smoldering fire. Gilbert averted his gaze that she might not detect his disapproval.

She puffed contentedly and answered:

"Maria stays here sometimes. But, *Nombre de Dios!* It is not leeving. Beel Williams *leeves* here."

There was pathos in her hopeless voice. Only remembrance of the part she had played in his downfall restrained Gilbert from venturing on the dangerous ground of pity. Then she was all animation and laughing and softly clapping her hands and pointing to a pine-squirrel and a red-headed woodpecker engaged in a lively battle.

"*El Bravo!* Ver' brave *caballero!* He makes the robber run! *Bueno! Señor Carpentero*, I salute you!"

"The woodpecker drives the squirrel away. Why?" asked Gilbert, boyishly interested.

"*Señor Carpentero* drills a hole in the oak or pine beeg enough to hold the nut of the oak. The robber on four legs comes to steal. They fight! Is it not? All day one hides away, one comes to steal. Jus' like men. Down in the valley of the Sacramento, where there are many oaks, they hide and steal all the time."

Her enjoyment of the woods warfare was that of a little child. Gilbert found it difficult to reconcile this simplicity with the cunning and sophistication she had displayed in seducing him to appropriate others' gold and gamble it away.

Interested in her description of the "carpenter's" way of storing nuts, Gilbert examined the tree. It was a yellow pine. Its thick bark resembled cork and was divided into smooth areas measuring some four inches by six. These surfaces appeared to be studded with wooden pegs. A closer examination revealed each "peg" to be an acorn, driven into a nicely calculated hole by the industrious bird.

"That's mighty smart! That's clever!" Gilbert admiringly exclaimed.

"Like a Yankee trick, *sí?*" murmured the girl mischievously.

Sounds of the warfare being renewed in the growth back of old Miguel's cabin led Gilbert in that direction.

To his surprize the girl displayed agitation and seized his arm and insisted:

"No, no. He ver' queer old man. Ver' queeck not to like it. We will go back to the fire and talk."

"Your grandfather doesn't want any one to walk in the pines behind his cabin?" inquired the puzzled youth.

"He is ver' queer old man. We will go back to the fire."

He allowed himself to be led away; only he remonstrated:

"But why not? This valley belongs to Old Misery. He hasn't said there is any part of it I'm not to visit."

"It is ver' bad," she simply replied. "Señor Misery would say' ver' bad medicine! It is not good for you to walk too much alone, *señor.*"

"What about the miners, Miss? They'll be swarming through this part of the valley tomorrow."

She was visibly disturbed and rapidly said something in Spanish which he did not understand.

Then in English she abruptly said:

"Good-by. Tomorrow we will talk again. Is it not?"

And with her gliding step she returned to her cabin and entered.

"Good Lord! What would the Walker girls think of her?" he muttered.

He was still meditating over her strange behavior and wondering why the patch of pines back of the second cabin should be forbidden him when his line of thought was broken by the female bear. She was fat and heavy but as yet did not possess a "dangerous mouth." She insisted on romping and on being petted.

When Old Misery returned he found his protégé and the bear rolling on the grass and wrestling, with the tethered bear frantically trying to break loose and join in the fun.

The mountain man grinned approvingly and remarked:

"The little lady takes to you. That's a p'int in your favor, younker. She's far safer for you to play with than some other little ladies." And his gaze switched around toward old Miguel's cabin.

Ignoring the hint, Gilbert asked—

"Why isn't it all right for me to walk through the woods?"

"You've got two legs. Roads are open. Go where you want to, but don't git lost."

"But Maria says I mustn't." And he related how she had interrupted his quest for more samples of the carpenter bird's work behind Miguel's cabin.

Old Misery stroked his beard thoughtfully, then surprized Gilbert by saying:

"That young streak of scarlet has the right of it. I was forgitting. Don't wander behind that cabin till you git better 'quainted with the valley—and with Miguel. What's the name of the boss of the Vermont outfit you was to give the gold to in Coloma?"

"Elnathan Plumb. The letter was sent to him. What'll they be thinking? The letter that told of my coming took only twenty-five days by the way of the Isthmus. If they'd only written to Plumb to go to San Francisco and get the money instead of having me carry it to him, but they wouldn't chance his having died before the letter reached Coloma."

"Yankees don't like to take chances," growled Old Misery. "But they was right. Men move 'round mighty sudden out here. And drop out of sight. And, mebbe, the folks back home thought you'd be able to deliver the dust."

Gilbert groaned.

The mountain man continued:

"But fretting 'n' fussing don't dress any hides. 'Stead of looking back and being sorry look ahead and see how the muss can be mended."

"Mended!" And Gilbert laughed despairingly. "Even if I was worth five dollars a day to you, which I never could be, it would take me a year to make up what I lost."

"Well, we'll see," gravely replied the mountain man. "I've lived with Injuns so long that I don't mind waiting a bit. There's no end to the number of days hiding below the eastern skyline. Every twenty-four hours a new one comes streaming along. Of course it's different with a double-time feller like you. I'm plumb s'prized the Coloma man didn't git that letter afore it was sent."

Dropping his sarcasm, he seriously added:

"I picked up some of the best medicines among the Injuns. I've got a mighty strong Crow medicine. It might work, but it's best for stealing hosses. I lived with 'em till my wife died. Then the lodge seemed sorter lonesome. Mebbe a Chippewa medicine I got from old Flat Mouth, chief of the Pillager Band, would be stronger. I dunno. I like the Crows as a tribe. Still I don't let my likings fool me 'bout medicines. I hanker more for a good Chippewa medicine-song then I do for a Crow, Sioux, or Cheyenne. They're so —— human."

And he hummed under his breath, "*He-hi-hi-hi,*" the meaningless exclamations used to fill out a Midi song.

Gilbert gazed at him in amazement, unable to decide whether the old man was crazy, or was making more fun of him. The mountain man was thoroughly in earnest, however, and plucked at his beard and frowned as he weighed some point.

Finally he muttered:

"Two nights ago I dreamed the clouds was choking the eastern sky. Old Flat Mouth could guess its meaning, but —— if I can. Last night I dreamed I was young again and singing the 'Four Bears' song. I'll have to burn some terbacker. If old Flat Mouth could talk to me a minute, or any man who's took the fourth degree in the Midewiwin, he'd guess my dreams. There are eight degrees, but a fourth-degree man oughter be strong 'nough." And he cleared his throat and repeated, "*Ho-ho-ho-ho.*"

"I can't see—" Gilbert began.

"Then keep shet. It ain't needed for you to see. Had your eyes open ever since you was born'd, ain't you? Ain't seen much yet, have you? Eyes didn't do you much good in Frisco, did they? You know you're in a bad mess. It's hurting you inside a heap and all the time to think how you lost that gold. But showing that cussed Joaquin the way to the winder is a worse business for you. He'd found it and got out without your help, but folks are blaming *you*.

"Now some one's got to snag you out of two bad messes. You're more helpless then that little bear gal there, trying to wake Bill Williams without gitting lambasted. If you know any white medicine that'll help you, go into the woods and raise a lodge. If you don't know any, then keep out the trail and let a red medicine have a chance to work.

And he turned on his heel and walked up into the pines.

Thoroughly miserable, Gilbert lay on his face on the grass and dropped asleep. He did not know the girl Maria sat by him, watching him and thinking primitive, fundamental thoughts. Night was blotting out the fresh Spring colors in the lower valley when the girl glided back to her cabin in time to escape the sharp eyes of Old Misery. The mountain man was accompanied by two men, and it was the one with the rolling gait that aroused Gilbert from a home-dream by cursing in hoarse blue-water terms. Gilbert threw some pine cones on the coals and glanced apprehensively at the newcomers. The one with the long beard had the stature of a giant.

The mountain man shortly told his companions:

"This is my new helper."

He enlightened Gilbert by saying:

"This is Weymouth Mass and his medicine, Sailor Ben. Two fool miners. We'll eat and walk down to Phelps' camp. Younker, you're dog-tired and best stay here."

And he nudged Gilbert's leg with the toe of his moccasin.

"Can't see your colors," growled the sailor, dropping heavily on the grass. "Two much land. Every breeze is a squall over the weather bow. Come of quitting blue water."

"Now, Ben! None of that," rumbled Weymouth Mass. Then to Gilbert: "I'd think you'd go in for hunting gold. You look to be able-bodied. Somewhere in these old mountains is the mother-lode. The source of all gold! Thrown up by a volcano. Some one will find it some time. It might be a greenhorn. Probably will be, if—" and he paused to stare down at the figure of the sailor—"if some worthless creature that's supposed to be lucky stops his natural-born luck from leading him to it."

"Avast! Heave short! Too much land," complained Sailor Ben.

Weymouth seated himself and stirred up the coals and mildly inquired:

"What were you doing in the little brush shelter, Misery? I almost stepped on it."

"What'n —— you want to come prowling round in the woods for?" snorted the mountain man wrathfully. "Had a notion you'd find gold hanging on the pines? Huh!" Aside to Gilbert he explained: "I raised a lodge and was working my medicine hard when the big lummox come crashing along and sp'iled everything. But this ain't eating."

They took the hint and bestirred themselves in preparing the evening meal, Gilbert proving himself to be very capable. The big miner was eager to assist, but did little beyond getting in the way. Sailor Ben made no pretense at helping, frankly stating it would impair his stock of luck. He impressed Gilbert as being a sour, disgruntled sort of a man. With the glow of the fire painting their faces they ate their supper. Old Misery threw a bit of food over his shoulder to propitiate the ghosts before tasting the meat and bread. Weymouth Mass between mouthfuls cast puzzled glances at Gilbert, trying to remember why the young man's face was familiar.

At last it came back to him, and, pounding a big fist on his knee, he roared:

"Glory be! That's it! The young man who wanted to shoot Bill Williams!"

"You've told it to the Humboldt Mountains, Weymouth," grumbled the mountain man. "Bill Williams knows that was all a bit of fun. All the younker had was an Allen. You'll forgit all about it, Weymouth."

The Massachusetts man was puzzled, but detected a warning in the words, and mumbled:

"Forget all about it. Of course."

Sailor Ben came to his feet buoyantly when Old Misery announced it was time to be on their way to the miners' camp.

But Weymouth sternly warned:

"Now, Ben! None of that. I know the signs. You're still on deck. No carousing while on watch. I won't have it."

"When you're in ballast and the weather's calm—" hoarsely began the sailor.

"Not a single snort!" warmly broke in Weymouth.

"Don't lose your ha'r, Weymouth. There ain't a drink in the whole outfit," spoke up Old Misery.

Ben sank back on the grass, sighed dismally and decided—

"I'll take a few winks while waiting for a breeze."

Gilbert already had taken the hint and announced his intention of going to bed.

Miner and mountain wanderer went down the valley together, the former carefully explaining how the sailor's secret hankering for rum was interfering with his luck.

"The gold's waiting to be found, and he can find it, Misery. Find the mother-lode! Think of it! Cliffs and solid walls of pure gold! But he can't get results from his luck so long's his mind is pickled in whisky. We didn't do any real hunting today. Just put in the time hustling him up and down the slopes to sweat the rum-notions out of his thick head. In a few days he'll be ripe to work. Then—a mountain of pure gold!"

"Huh! When that happy day comes, Weymouth, gold won't be worth as much as a spruce lodge-pole in the Black Hills. And they grow tolerably thick there."

Weymouth wound his beard around his arm and thoughtfully replied:

"We'll only cart away a part of the cliff or ledge at a time. We'll be very sly."

"Sly like a drunken Teton. One thing's in your favor. Every one believes Ben is a liar, and you was never known to find any gold in all the time you've been out here. So if you wear ragged clothes and beg for grub——"

"You exaggerate most cruelly, Misery. And there's the camp-fire," interrupted Weymouth.

THE two received a boisterous welcome, and a leather bottle containing nearly a gallon of Sonora brandy was produced. Weymouth refused, saying the sailor might detect the aroma on his breath and be tempted. Old Misery drank generously and endorsed it with a ringing war-whoop. Then Phelps and the Georgia man, speaking for the party, began a sharp examination of Weymouth.

The Massachusetts man reclined at ease and puffed his pipe and stated his firm belief there was a great quantity of gold in that immediate vicinity; but his listeners exchanged gloomy glances and did not seem to be rejoicing. When he was pinned down to details of his search it soon became apparent he had depended entirely upon the sailor and that the latter's luck couldn't work so long as he was yearning for strong drink.

"But Ben always wants a drink," cried the Georgia man. "Haven't you done any digging and panning?"

"A little. No color yet. But I don't depend on that. I'm depending on Ben. All in good time, after I've sweat and fried and boiled the rum-hankering out of him."

"Don't you boys git down-hearted," spoke up Old Misery. "Just tell 'em all you know about gold, Weymouth. Then they'll see you're a good man to listen to."

Weymouth, pleased to have a fresh and willing audience, readily obliged, saying:

"Gold is a queer thing. Queerer than a woman. It's almost as old as woman, too. If you know the Good Book you'll remember that in the first chapter of Genesis it reads, 'Male and female created He them.' And that a few verses farther on, in the next chapter, it says that there's gold in the land of Havilah, and that the gold there 'is good.' "

"That's a camp down on the head of the Kern River!" exclaimed one of the men.

"Then it was named after the 'Havilah' in the Bible," insisted Weymouth, but looking worried. "But the mother-lode can't be way down there. It must be up here."

"Mebbe there's a ridge of gold that stretches from hereabouts 'way down there," encouraged Old Misery.

The immensity of this possibility dazed Weymouth for a moment; then he resumed, speaking quite like a pedagog:

"Old Job knew all about mining, too. He was a keen prospector, I imagine. He tells of 'laying up gold as dust,' and swears that the gold of Ophir was 'as the stones of the brooks.' Nuggets, you see."

"——! that's on the Feather up near Bidwell's Bar!" cried one of the audience.

"Never knew they'd mentioned Ophir in the Bible," confessed the Georgia man. "Anyway, that old cuss was a placer-man, all right."

"Placer-man first; then a quartz man," firmly corrected Weymouth. "For you'll find where he says, 'Surely there is a vein for the silver and place for gold where they *fine* it.' His way of spelling *refine*. Proves they had stamp-mills."

"If that ain't medicine that proves what I told you cusses about silver in Carson Valley then I never ate boiled dog!" loudly insisted Old Misery.

"Those old galoots knew the game backward," conceded a shaggy man from Ohio.

Weymouth recovered his line of thought after a bit and went on:

"So gold's a queer thing. As queer and old as woman. And silver's almost as queer. Some two thousand years ago Abraham paid four hundred shekels of silver for a burying-place. Inside of one year Solomon collected six hundred and sixty-six talents in gold."

"Cuss me if he didn't have Joaquin Murieta looking like a scorched pup!" exploded Old Misery. "That is, if a 'talent' was a heap big coin."

"His one year's collection in our money would amount to a million and a half dollars," explained Weymouth. "It made silver 'to be as the stones in Jerusalem.' "

"What I've always said," broke in the Georgia man. "Silver's no good."

"There was cords of gold in Babylon," Weymouth informed them, fearing to lose his audience. "One old Persian king got together seventeen million dollars' worth of gold."

"Hold on," growled Phelps. "Leave that for Sailor Ben to tell."

"But it's true," firmly insisted the Massachusetts man. "If you think that's a fair-to-middling lot of gold what do you say to a king in Egypt, who, says history, was worth eighty-six million dollars in gold?"

"I'd say hist'ry's a —— old liar!" roared the mountain man belligerently, the brandy making him argumentative. "No one can count as high. How can a man tell he has that much if he can't count it? Waugh!"

"If it is true," growled the Georgia man, "then we're wasting our time up here. Those old-timers must 'a' got it all."

"Let's get back to the beginning," suggested Phelps. "Misery, we've named a committee of five men to prospect your valley. Now, Weymouth, all this Bible gold happened several years ago. We want to know about gold of today. Have you found any likely prospects?"

"Not yet. But I will. I'll find the mother-lode. Ben's luck will begin working after I get the rum-thoughts out of his head. Luck and gold are the queerest things in the world except a woman."

Old Misery fished a small bag from his shirt and from it extracted a tiny bit of gold shaped like an Indian moccasin, and declared:

"That's the only bit of gold I ever took a shine to. Looks like a Crow moccasin. It's strong medicine; I'd rather have it than to dream of hawks. Needn't begin making wolf eyes. It come from Coarse Gold Gulch in Fresno. I told you I got gold in trade from all over. Of course there's a mother-lode of gold some'ers; but when you fellers find it gold will drop to about two-bits a thousand pounds. I'm feeling too wolfish round the shoulders to talk any more about picking gold out of mud. I'll wrassle, run, jump or fight any man in the crowd."

The circle exchanged uneasy glances. There were but few of them who had not seen Old Misery in his moments of relaxation. Weymouth read the storm signals and announced—

"Time we went up the valley and slept it off, Misery."

"But I feel playful," insisted the mountain man. "Let's have a ring-wrassle. Me on the inside the circle trying to git out."

Weymouth Mass leisurely got to his feet; then seized the unsuspecting mountain man by thigh and shoulder and raised him above his head and said to the gaping circle—

"Good night."

"—— you, Weymouth! Let me down," roared the mountain man. "I've got my knife out! I'll cut your head off!"

"If you do, it'll simply prove what a fool rum can make of a man," grunted Weymouth, still walking slowly into the timber.

"Set me on my feet," shortly commanded Old Misery. "I'm harmless as Bill Williams. Don't seem to be any fun left in the world. Mebbe it's because those old cusses found gold."

CHAPTER V

CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE

THE committee of five prospected the valley widely, taking care to keep away from Bill Williams' retreat under the overhanging ledge. For several days they ranged back and forth. Old Misery was annoyed by their presence, but bowing before the immutable law that gives gold the right of way. At last, in disgust, they went down the valley for the last time and dispersed in search of new prospects.

Shortly after they broke camp Old Misery, unaccompanied by the bear, wandered far up the valley and did not return until the next day.

To Gilbert he said:

"I'm going away for a bit pretty soon. While I'm gone you stick close here. Weymouth Mass will see that no one bothers you when he's round, and that streak of scarlet will lead you into hiding if it looks stormy while Weymouth's away. I'm going back in the hills higher up and make a new medicine."

He took cooked food with him and was gone until night. He was in a bad humor when he returned and cursed much under his breath. Gilbert could not imagine what could be the trouble. The mountain man entered the cabin that night and rubbed his arms with something from a bottle.

Gilbert offered to rub his back and was surprized to be courteously encouraged—

"Go ahead."

"Panther oil," grunted Misery as the young man kneaded the shoulder muscles. "Powerful good for aches and lames."

"You must have wrenched yourself in some way," remarked Gilbert as he rippled his oiled fingers up and down each side of the backbone.

"That hurts like —— and feels powerful good!" groaned Misery. "If you mean I lamed myself, I done it in every way. There, younker! Reckon that'll do. *Hau!* Begin to feel wolfish again."

He was gone the next day, not returning until night. There was more complaining and grumbling, but so obscurely expressed as to convey no meaning; and there was more rubbing with the oil. For four days this was kept up, much to the young man's mystification.

He ventured to inquire of the girl Maria, but she cut him short with—

"When *Señor Comandante* wants his beeznis told he will tell. Is it not?"

And to his chagrin she appeared to be avoiding him thereafter, and he saw her only in glimpses.

Her old grandfather seldom wandered from his cabin door, and then only to feel his way with a staff to the prohibited area of pines. Weymouth and the sailor must have been prospecting at some distance as they did not return. Left thus alone Gilbert was very lonely. He made great friends with Bill Williams and played much with the young bears. The panther kittens and wolf pups seemed to appreciate his attentions, and although the former spat at him yet they tolerated his fondling their heads.

Once Maria came up to the cage as he was petting the kittens and remarked:

"Like a woman, Señor Gilbert. Is it not? They do not show how they feel. They act ver' angry; they feel ver' please."

And she darted him one of her enigmatical glances.

"They are deceitful little wretches," he agreed.

"Mos' women are," she admitted; but he had referred to the kittens.

At the end of the fourth day Old Misery returned with sprightly step and singing the Sioux song of an Elk-Dreamer. His eyes were bright and lively.

"One more of them medicine rubs, younker, and I'll be fit to sing a Kiowy travel-song and be hoofing it."

"We're going away?" eagerly asked Gilbert. "And I can begin to earn my keep?"

"You've earned it with them rubs, and by making friends with my friends. I'm carrying the pipe alone. Sorry, younker, but bimeby the trail will be wide 'nough for both to hoof it together. You have a medicine way with them cats. One of 'em tried to claw —— out of my hand. Let's see your paws."

Only a few minor scratches showed.

"You have a *wakan* way with 'em for sartain," admiringly declared the mountain man. "Them's only love digs. I'm for my blankets. Must start early. If I was back in Vermont I'd be three hours on my way afore waking up. Be back in a few days. Stick close to camp."

Gilbert was asleep while the mountain man prepared for his journey. The girl Maria appeared, however, and cooked his breakfast in the open. Pausing only to pat Bill Williams' sleepy head, he started down the valley, his back to the new sun.

As he reached the fringe of timber choking the lower end of the valley the girl Maria overtook him and softly cried—

"*Señor Comandante* goes away without the bear?"

"You knew that, Maria. You see me start off alone. Now what is it?" he quizzed.

"Who is *comandante* until *Señor Comandante* comes back?"

He grinned and suggested—

"The young *Americano.*"

"No, no!" she sharply cried. "Not heem. He is what you call a greenhorn."

"Well, then I'll name Bill Williams."

"*Nombre de Dios!* Beel Williams!" she gasped. Then coaxingly, "Let *Señor Comandante* say Maria is *comandante* until he comes back."

"Not for a jug of the best Sonora brandy, you young streak of scarlet. And remember; no tricks on the *Americano*. He is in trouble along of your deviltry. See that the pups and kittens don't git loose. Feed Bill well and take him for a walk each day in the pines. Remember, don't go to giving any orders to the younker. He's in 'nough trouble without having a woman to boss him. Good-by. Be a good girl. I'm coming back in a few days."

She ran back to her cabin and he resumed his journey. Besides his rifle and knife he carried a Colt's navy revolver, so called to commemorate Commodore E. W. Moore's work in organizing a navy for the State of Texas and in defeating the Mexican fleet in 1843.

MISERY pursued a course a few miles to the east of Dutch Flat on Bear River and traveled southwest, making occasional detours to avoid a camp or isolated cabin. Soft-footed as a mountain lion he would glide through a stretch of timber within sound of men's voices without revealing his presence. At Iowa Hill he halted and bought a meal and a drink at a tent. Without Bill Williams for a companion he was not conspicuous, for other men in buckskin were frequently wandering down the west side of the Sierra to watch the moles at work. He decided to call it a day's work when near Kelly's Bar on the North Fork of the American. It was a beautiful rolling country and columned with enormous pines although the ever hungry sawmills were threatening soon to denude the land. Near by were three slab huts. Some distance beyond was a sawmill surrounded by huge stumps.

"—— fools is worse 'n beavers," he growled as he strode up to the nearest hut.

A tall, round-shouldered man in snuff-colored trousers and butternut shirt appeared in the doorway and fastened his melancholy gaze on Misery.

"This place oughter be Illinoistown," commented the mountain man.

The man nodded wearily.

"What you got to eat?" asked Misery.

"Stewed squirrels. Not many."

"Meaning I ain't welcome and me willing to pay?" demanded the mountain man.

"Meaning that a hellion asleep inside 'lows he's going to eat all of 'em, stranger," replied the man in a low voice. "I'm thinking of going over and eating with the mill-men."

Old Misery's spirits lifted. He had disliked making this particular journey. He rejoiced that his medicine had seen fit to provide him with diversion.

"The better man oughter eat stewed squirrels," he reflected. "And I'm powerful fond of 'em. You're a Pike?"

"Crawly City, nigh Huntersville. 'Low I'll be mizzlin'. That hellion might wake up any minute. And his whisky's all gone. He's going to be master mad, stranger."

Old Misery grinned contentedly, placed his rifle on the ground and spat on his hands, and advised:

"You trail along to the mill. I'll have a look at this varmint who's fond of the same kind of meat as I be."

"He'll do you a 'tarnal hurt," warned the Pike County man, hastily quitting the doorway.

"Mebbe. I've been chawed and clawed by 'bout everything from the Upper Missouri to Sonora below the line. My medicine tells me you better be going. Innercent folks just looking on sometimes git killed."

From the hut a ferocious voice roared:

"—— and alkali! Who took that bottle?"

The Pike County man ran for the mill with the speed of a deer. Old Misery dropped his revolver and knife on the ground and stole to the doorway. He could hear the man moving about as he gave voice to blood-curdling threats.

Then he came to the door, and instantly the mountain man leaped upon him, yelling:

"—— you! You'll eat stewed squirrels, will you?"

With a howl of rage the other accepted combat, and in the semi-darkness of the hut they revolved and fought like wild-cats.

"I'll eat your heart!" promised the stranger.

Old Misery gave him his knee, stamped on his foot and drove his elbow against the side of his head, and in return received a smash that for a second flattened him against the side of the hut. Almost instantly he was attacking and ducking low as the other loosed a terrific blow. The mountain man seized his opponent around the knees; then by the simple process of throwing himself on his back he shot the fellow over his head and through the doorway. The stranger was below medium height, but of powerful frame. He struck heavily, and before he could get to his feet Old Misery was on his back and hoarsely sounding a war-whoop.

The man ceased struggling and grunted—

"You, Misery?"

The raised fist was lowered. Seizing the long hair, the mountain man jerked the man's head to one side and got his first look at the fellow's face.

"—— if it ain't Tom Tobin! Now we've got to divvy them stewed squirrels."

Tobin, Irish and hot-tempered, was a veteran mountain man and had found paths with Carson for other men to follow.

His homely, brick-red face twisted into a broad grin as he greeted—

"You'd never fetched me, Misery, if you hadn't been low-down 'nough to bite."

"Never went for to bite you, Tom," earnestly replied Old Misery as they clasped hands. "I was just going to let out my Crow yell when you butted me and my mouth slipped. You little runt! I ain't had so much fun since the Cheyennes had me cornered in the North River Mountains. Let's go in and finish them squirrels."

Tobin cursed him fondly, and after the stew was finished they sat late into the night, telling their experiences. The Pike County man and the mill-men stole up and listened to the stirring recitals. Tobin had been fighting Comanches, Apaches and Kiowas while Old Misery was working at the bay for the Hudson's Bay Company.

After Tobin finished an unusually bloodcurdling bit of history his friend remained silent for nearly a minute; then startled his audience by sounding a war-whoop.

And he confessed:

"I've been missing lots of fun, Tom. I'm homesick for the Rockies. No Injuns worth fighting out here. They eat cat'pillars. Snare rabbits. Make good ranch men if the whites don't kill 'em all off. I've wintered half a dozen lodges, or they'd 'a' starved. Some miners don't think nothing of shooting the poor ——. You've give me an itch to cross over the ridge."

One of the mill-men spoke up, saying:

"Saw a feller over to Coloma week ago who's crazy to go back East. Seems homesick for it like you be, mister. He's been out here three seasons and has made a little strike."

"Uh-uh," grunted Misery, discouragingly. "I ain't hankering to go back East. I was thinking of the Rockies."

"This feller wants to go 'way back. They call him 'Pretty Soon Jim.' "

"Jim Pipps!" exclaimed Misery, now interested. "Well, if that poor, long, lengthy —— has made a strike I'm glad to hear it. He's 'bout as much good out here as a powder-horn in ——."

In the morning the friends parted. Tobin was bound for Marysville; he promised to look Misery up after the latter had explained that his camp was in "the foothills of the Sierra."

The mountain man felt strangely lonesome as he walked to Kelly's Bar. His mind persisted in dwelling on the Rockies and the plains, where animal life was stalwart and dignified, and where there were many red men worthy to follow a great chief. He even gave a thought to Jim Pipps, the strange, eccentric character who was ever talking about "going home, pretty soon."

Descending to the river, he did not halt at the rocky bar but climbed the opposite slope and hastened on until he sighted a ranch in a majestic grove of pines. The building looked very tiny, and he would have passed it if not for the canvas sign that announced—

THE GRIZZLY-BEAR HOUSE

The name appealed, and he decided to stop and eat. Had his business been less pressing he would have tarried and tried the hunting. The skin of a grizzly, covering the greater part of one side of the dining-room, touched his ambition. He felt the need of much action, as the meeting with Tobin had left him uneasy, restless and dissatisfied. He could see he had been losing precious years while he lived at Yerba Buena and watched it magically spring into San Francisco.

After dinner he went his way, but was tempted to sound his war-cry and run back and challenge all marksmen as the crack of rifles told him the ranch loungers were having a shooting-match.

Fifteen miles over a well-traveled trail were covered with the long, ceaseless stride of his kind, bringing him to Spanish Bar on the Middle Fork of the American. From the top of the high ridge he could trace the thread-like river far below as it wound in and out among the mountains. He worked down the steep slope with the ease of long training, and half-way down met a small band of prospectors toiling upward.

The leader cried: "For——'s sake! Where is the top?"

The bar, half a mile long and several hundred yards wide, had its single street of huts and tents jammed back against the base of the mountains. It would be two hours before the miners would leave their heaps of stone, hot with the reflected rays of the sun, and Old Misery did not care to wait. At a large tent announcing itself to be "The United States Hotel" he traded virgin gold for cooked beef, pickles and bread.

As Old Misery paid a man to take him across the river and was entering the dugout the hotel proprietor ran from his tent, loudly bawling:

"Hi! Old man! Come back here! This gold. Want to talk to you about it."

"He wants you to come back," said the ferryman, starting to back-paddle.

"Go on, or I'll cut all your ha'r off," threatened Misery, tapping his long knife.

As the dugout approached the southern bank red-shirted miners came running from their diggings, eager to overtake the stranger who carried gold with sharp edges, such as was never laid down by tertiary rivers. Several commenced crossing in a second dugout as the mountain man leaped ashore. But there was none in Spanish Bar who could overtake him once he breasted the long slope and its network of paths. Two men made the endeavor but were fairly a third of the way up the ridge when he disappeared over the top.

Having shaken off the curious ones, Old Misery circled around Greenwood and entered the long, winding Greenwood (or Long's) Valley. Cutting into this were many small ravines which extended back into the low hills. When Old Misery last traveled this way men were frantically digging for gold. All those had passed on, and only the holes in the dry creek and the side-ravines testified to their early efforts. There were cabins scattered along the twisting creek bed, but none was occupied, and only the chatter of squirrels and the scolding of blue-jays were to be heard.

"A man didn't oughter be crowded in here with so many lodges to choose from," he mused aloud as he halted and proceeded to eat his supper. "Wish Tom Tobin was here. Said I bit him! The derned, lying little cuss! In a minute more he'd lost an ear."

He had planned to camp there beside one of the empty cabins, but now that dusk was trailing around the rocky bends his memory quickened and the place lost its appeal. He recalled the tragic occurrence at Dry Diggings, nine miles from Coloma, back in January of 1849. Five men had tried to rob the gambler Lopez but were captured almost on the spot. Three of them were hanged—Garcia, Bissi and Manuel. And Dry Diggings promptly came to be known as "Hangtown" because of this first sample of rude justice bestowed on rogues in California. And Hangtown the place would always be to Old Misery although now wearing the more euphonious name of Placerville.

What connected the early lynching with the valley, however, was the story of another of the five robbers, who was whipped and banished, and whose career was never finished in any printed annals. The story went that he was pursued and overtaken in this valley by a small band of men and hanged to a pine by the side of the cabin on Misery's left. Only the cabin had not stood there when the miserable victim of unglutted vengeance was executed. Old-timers in camp under moaning pines had told Misery of the dead robber's spirit wandering about the valley, wearing the white cloth the executioners from some whim had tied over his head. And Old Misery believed in ghosts as firmly as any of the Indian tribes he had lived with or had fought against.

"Comfort," he told his rifle, "we can git along good with anything you can see to shoot, but if that dead cuss is still wandering round these parts we ain't carrying any pipe against *him*. We'll jog along a spell farther to where there ain't no bones to cover."

He decided to push through to Coloma, only a few miles distant, although his preference was for a bed in the open. As it was he did not enter the town, but spread his blankets a short distance out.

COLOMA revealed few symptoms of being a busy mining-center, although it was here that gold was first discovered to light the fires of greed throughout the world. After the first rush in 1848 the diggings had not proven exceptionally good. The houses scattered along the foot of the mountain were neat and painted and suggested homes of an agricultural community; for it was an old town with five years of history behind it.

Old Misery went to a hotel and while eating breakfast heard much loud laughing from the adjoining barroom. Finishing his meal he stepped into the bar to learn the cause of the merriment. Half a dozen men appeared to be making sport of a tall, thin man whose long face was both melancholy and wistful. His garments looked as if he had picked them up from mining-camp dumps. He carried no weapons.

"Now, Pipps, you had your chance," a man was saying as Old Misery stepped inside the door; "you had your chance. You found a three-thousand-dollar pocket, and instead of going back home you gambled it away. Here you are, wanting a drink and lacking the price."

"But I spent a tolerable lot of the dust over this bar," countered Pipps. "As for gambling, I never do, nor did. Last thing I remember is a feller saying, 'Derned if he ain't lost it all.' Then I woke up this morning dry and nothing in my pockets."

A shout of amusement greeted this.

The spokesman continued:

"Your credit went with your money. If you'll solemnly promise to work for me in the store ten hours today I'll buy you a drink and pay you five dollars tonight."

"I'd like to work for you, Mr. Stacy, if I could afford to; but I'm in a hustle to get back in the hills and find another pocket. Let me find it and I'll be going home pretty soon."

This assertion, spoken with great earnestness, appealed to the idlers as being rich with humor, and they laughed much.

"He can't afford to work for Mr. Stacy," chuckled the bartender. "Working in a store a whole day might poison him."

More bantering followed, the victim fumbling at his thin beard and glancing wistfully from face to face.

The storekeeper continued:

"All I asked was for you to promise. If you can't do that much you can't drink. That right, boys?"

The group heartily approved.

Pipps sighed and turned to leave the room, apologizing—

"I don't want to 'pear perked up, but if I promised I'd have to bide by it."

"And that's a —— of a lot more'n lots of folks in this burying-ground would do," spoke up the raucous voice of the mountain man as he blocked Pipps' path.

Before an angry reply could be made from any of the onlookers Old Misery had led Pipps back to the bar and had laid down a small piece of gold and was ordering—

"A bottle of whisky if you've got time to spare from funning to wait on me."

"Land sakes alive if it ain't Old Misery!" gasped Pipps.

"Who'n —— be you?" demanded the bartender, objecting to having trade interrupt the morning's sport.

A buckskin-clad arm shot across the bar, and a strong hand gripped the drink-server's well oiled topknot, and the mountain man was explaining—

"I'm the man who ain't took a sculp for so long that my knife needs limbering up."

"Back up, Jack. You're new here or you'd know."

Then to the mountain man—

"You're Old Misery from up Yuba River way?"

"I be," complacently admitted the mountain man, releasing his prisoner.

The latter hastily pushed forward a bottle.

Old Misery filled his glass and told Pipps:

"Pretty Soon, have a snort or two. What's the talk 'bout you frittering away your dust gambling?"

"But I never gambled, Misery," eagerly insisted Pretty Soon Jim Pipps as he gulped down a tall drink. "Some one said I'd lost it all, and it was gone."

"Just low-down stealing," growled Old Misery, casting an ugly glance at the citizens.

"Coloma's an orderly town. We have no stealings here," insisted the store-keeper.

"Never knew a dead town to do much r'aring and prancing. If you didn't talk I'd think this place was asleep. But Pretty Soon Jim ain't no liar. I believe him. Some low-down skunk robbed him while he was fool-drunk."

He glared belligerently around for a few moments, then asked Pipps—

"What'll you do next?"

Pipps took another drink, dubious as to the elasticity of the mountain man's hospitality, and explained:

"Got to find another pocket. I was all ready to go back home. Now I'll have to wait another season. It's cruel hard, too."

Some one snickered.

Old Misery encouraged:

"Don't you mind 'em, Pretty Soon. If they'd lost a ounce of dust they'd be bleating so's one could hear it in Stockton. Best thing you can do is to work for day wages and go home next Spring."

Warmed by the liquor, Pretty Soon Jim straightened his long figure and loudly asserted his intention to remain a free man. He would return to prospecting and make another strike. Let him but uncover another pocket and Joaquin Murieta himself couldn't take it from him.

The bartender hoarsely broke in:

"Leave out threats against Murieta when you're in here. We don't want to be shot up or burned out along of your fool talk."

"Talk 'bout him all you want to," said Old Misery. "You're a better man then he is, Pretty Soon. What you git you come by honest, and you keep your word."

The bartender subsided.

Pretty Soon Jim, stiffened with artificial assurance, clutched the bottle tightly and boldly met the gaze of the citizens and loudly harangued:

"Three's a lucky number. Yes, siree! And this is my third year in this forsaken place. When the season opened I felt it in my blood that pretty soon I was going home. Yes, sir! Then I struck that pocket. Some one robbed me. I don't gamble. It don't matter; I'll uncover another while my luck's high. I ain't no man's slave. I've fared lean at times, but I've worked only for myself since landing here."

"He feels whisky in his veins," spoke up one of the citizens.

"S'pose all of you feel some of it in yours and close your yap," suggested Old Misery, and he tossed another nugget on the bar.

As the men advanced to accept the curt invitation Stacy with quickening gaze took the gold from the bartender's hand and examined it closely. Slowly his face became flushed. He attempted to pass back the gold before his companions could observe it, but they were too quick for him. Crowding about him each in turn stared at it, and then directed a wolfish glance at the mountain man.

"Ledge! Richer'n spatter!" one huskily whispered.

"Mr. Misery, where'd you get this?" gently asked the storekeeper.

The mountain man grinned at the change in their demeanor. The bartender set out a bottle before each customer and then examined the nugget and wished he possessed some knowledge of mining, and wondered how he could profit by the queer old man's discovery.

"Got it a long way from here," explained Misery. "No one knows the spot 'cept me and a certain old bald eagle. Now, Pretty Soon, no more drinks on a empty stomach. You go in and eat a big lot of meat. I'll see you some time today."

To the bartender he directed:

"All he wants to eat but no more liquor till afternoon. I'm paying."

Pretty Soon smiled amiably and made for the dining-room.

"Yes, sir."

"He can come over to the store and eat dinner with me," eagerly offered the storekeeper. "I'll sort of keep an eye on him so's he won't get blind drunk. Any friend of yours, Mr. Misery——"

"He ain't got guts 'nough to be a friend even to hisself," broke in the mountain man, scowling at the complacent, weak face of the smiling Pipps. "But he's a harmless critter. Robbing him is as bad as robbing a baby. It's too bad that when a parcel of digger-and-root Injuns want to have fun with somebody they can't pick out a man that'll kick back.

"Now, me: I'd love to be playful. Just to show I like to be friendly and have some fun I'll bet a pound of this kind of gold chunks I'm carrying that the whole tribe of you can't put me out of this room. And we'll all heave our weepins into the corner afore starting the game."

And his gaze was warm and beaming as he made the offer.

Heads were shaken, and the half-circle grew wider. The storekeeper declared that Coloma prized his infrequent visits too highly to indulge in rough sport that might cause an injury.

"But I'd be gentle," pleaded Misery, reaching for the bottle, then pushing it away.

The men retreated one by one through the doorway, not necessarily in fear but to make preparations for a hurried journey once the mountain man left the town. Each man planned to trail Old Misery, and each distrusted the others.

Stacy was the last to go; and, having Old Misery to himself, he frankly offered:

"Let me put up a lot of money to develop that ledge, Mr. Misery. I've got the ready cash at the store. Those other fellows have only their picks and shovels. We'll need a mill. I can pay for it. You'll want some one to manage it, dividing the profits equal. I'm a business man. I can satisfy you I'm honest."

"I'll think it over," Old Misery gravely told him. "While I'm doing that you just remember Pretty Soon Jim here is a friend of mine. If I take any one with me I probably will ask Jim to name the man, me not being so well acquainted round these parts as he is."

"I am his friend and proud to be," warmly cried the storekeeper. "This is no place for him to pass the day in."

"What's the matter with this place?" fiercely demanded the bartender.

"He'd drink too much rum; that's the matter with it. He must come to my store. If you don't call for him this afternoon he must come to my home tonight."

"That talk sounds all right. I'll find him at your store. Now I'll look round a bit and git the kinks out my legs," said Old Misery.

His strolling took him to the outskirts of the town on the north side, where he paused and talked briefly with several citizens. When last seen he was making north from the town. Those who spied on him feared he had gone for good and roundly cursed their negligence in not being ready to trail him. But at dusk he returned, only now he was unobserved as the main street was singularly deserted.

BEFORE seeking Pretty Soon Jim at Stacy's store he decided he would refresh himself at the hotel bar. To his surprize the barroom was so crowded with citizens that he could not at first get beyond the doorway. Despite this unusual gathering there was no talking. The bartender leaned limply against the end of the bar, his eyes staring toward the end of the room. All eyes were turned in that direction.

Old Misery tugged a man's arm and asked—

"What's the trouble?"

"Murder!" exclaimed the man without shifting his gaze from the lower end of the bar.

The mountain man now observed the crowd was intent on that end of the room, and he knew the victim was there on the floor.

Suddenly another head appeared in the little opening, and the man was facing the silent spectators and loudly saying:

"He's dead. Barely managed to whisper two words——"

"The name, doctor! The name!" cried a man.

Others caught up the cry, the lust for vengeance shattering the death-like quiet of the place.

The doctor lifted a hand for silence and explained:

"His two words were 'six bags.' He doubtless referred to what the murderer stole. He was knifed three times from behind. Probably while kneeling to put away his gold in the strong box. It's quite remarkable that he managed to walk over here."

"Pipps done for him!" some one yelled. "He was at the store 'most all day. He's too drunk to git far!"

"We'll git him and hang him front the store!" cried another.

Then a babel of yells and imprecations made talk impossible. The doctor forced his way toward the door; the crowding, surging throng carried Old Misery close to the upper end of the bar, where the bartender, wild of eye, was leaning.

"Who's killed?" Old Misery demanded.

The bartender ran his tongue over his lips and managed to reply—

"Stacy, the storekeeper."

"Knifed and robbed and left for dead!" howled an excited citizen standing beside the mountain man. "Just at supper time. Not more'n half a hour ago at the most."

"There's the trail of blood where he managed to walk over here to find some of us boys," gasped another man, trembling and sick because of the fearful tragedy.

"That drunken Pretty Soon Jim Pipps done for him," hoarsely added the bartender. "We'll catch him before morning and string him up."

"Pretty Soon Jim ain't got guts 'nough to kill a rabbit," cried Old Misery. "What's to show he done it?"

The doctor had now returned and was working his way to the bar.

"There's no doubt about his doing it, old man," he sternly replied. "He had the chance and the motive. He hasn't sand enough to face a man and rob him. But he was crazy to go home. Ordinarily as harmless as a child, he was seized with a homicidal mania when he beheld Stacy kneeling, back to him, and in the act of locking up six bags of gold. He saw a knife. He grabbed it up and struck three times! I've no doubt he acted before he thought about the consequences. For the moment he was a mad man——"

"He'll stretch just the same!" roared one of the infuriated men.

The doctor shrugged his shoulders and quietly replied:

"That's for you folks to decide. We have no institutions here for caring for the criminally insane. But let's be orderly, even in arranging a hanging. The man is too well-known to escape. He's too drunk to get very far. Stacy's dead there in the corner. Let's spend a few minutes fitting the evidence together."

"Pretty Soon was busted. Lost three thousand in dust last night. That is, lost what he didn't blow in at this bar," spoke up the bartender.

"Every one knows how crazy he's been for two seasons to go back home. That hankering got him his name," eagerly supplied another.

"And Stacy took him over there this morning. Kept him to dinner. Let him sleep on a pile of blankets this afternoon. I was in there about three o'clock and heard him snoring."

"I told you not to sell him no more liquor," Old Misery shot at the bartender.

"And I didn't. He went over to the store right after breakfast," earnestly assured the bartender.

"You can take it for a fact Stacy didn't let him have any drinks," continued Old Misery. "He was too keen to share in on a rich ledge of mine to do any thing to fret me. So we have Pretty Soon staying there to dinner and sleeping off what rum he had afore breakfast. Who seen him after three o'clock in the afternoon?"

It transpired that none remembered seeing him; that none present was in the store after that hour.

But one man triumphantly reminded:

"Still he's cleared out, and Stacy's bled to death in this room. And the six bags of gold is missing."

"It looks like Pretty Soon Jim, old man, and no one else," calmly said the doctor.

"It looks!" scoffed the mountain man. "I've seen a burnt sugar-pine stump look so 'zactly like a grizzly that I emptied Solid Comfort into it. Here's one thing in Pretty Soon Jim's favor; he wouldn't lie. He wouldn't make a promise he didn't believe he'd keep. This morning he wouldn't say he'd do a day's work for a snort of whisky—and he did want that drink mortal bad. He promised to meet me at the store."

"Granting all that," quietly retorted the doctor, "the fact remains that when a man becomes unbalanced, if only for a minute, he does things he would never do when himself. It's doing the things you'd never ordinarily dream of doing, and couldn't be hired to do, that marks the crazy man. If no man ever did the undreamed-of thing there would be no one mentally unbalanced.

"I honestly believe the fellow was simple and thoroughly harmless until his eagerness to go back East destroyed his balance long enough to permit him to do this horrible crime. I wouldn't be surprized if this moment he's near here; that he realizes what he's done, and is so overcome he hasn't a thought of trying to escape."

"By ——! He'll move faster'n lightning and to the Atlantic Ocean but what we git him!" came an explosive voice from the middle of the infuriated crowd.

And angry glances were cast at the mountain man.

The latter calmly insisted:

"All I want is to git at the truth. I'd planned to help the poor cuss. I had intended to take him away and fix it so's he could go back East where he belongs. But the storekeeper must 'a' said something to some one. He had strength 'nough to walk here. Didn't he see nobody while crossing the street to speak to? Didn't he say anything after he got here? Didn't he name Pretty Soon Jim?"

"The bartender was alone when he stumbled in. He says Stacy never said a word but just groaned and fell down. Jack didn't know what was the matter with him at first and tried to help him. Then he ran to the street and yelled for the boys. It was supper time and it happened every one was off the street. It was growing dark and no one, that we can find, saw him cross the street. That's the way of it, Jack?"

The bartender nodded, and in a shaky voice explained for Old Misery's benefit:

"Tried to brace him up with a drink. Didn't know what's the matter with him till I got my hands all bloody. Then I see he'd been cut. Then I ran out and hollered."

Old Misery slowly conceded:

"If Pretty Soon Jim done this he oughter be strung up even if he's crazy. We have no places for caring for *heyoka* men out here. And if he'd kill once when crazy he might kill again. But I've seen him off 'n' on for more'n two seasons now, and he never showed as much spunk as a month-old cub bear. And none of you, who see him often, ever see him have any war-dreams while drunk. Liquor only made him feel grand and noble and richer'n all git-out. But if he done this thing he ain't no fit man to go back home.

"If he done this thing I must help hang him; for if it hadn't been for me he'd never gone to the store to wait all day. Too bad Stacy didn't talk any to you when you took him the drink." This to the bartender. "Still, Pretty Soon won't lie. He'll tell us he did it if he did do it. It's mighty tough to have to help hang a man you started out to help."

And he reached out to take up a glass of liquor on the bar.

"Don't," hurriedly restrained the man at his elbow. "That's the drink Jack tried to give poor Stacy."

The mountain man snatched his hand back as if escaping a poisonous serpent; and he stared with dilated eyes at the glass as if fascinated.

"Tried to git him to swaller it, thinking he'd had a fit, or something," hoarsely repeated the bartender. "He just lay there and groaned, and I set the glass down and tried to prop him up. That's when I got blood on my hands and knew something was wrong."

Old Misery leaned against the bar, then quickly seized the man by his top-knot. Up shot the bartender's hands to break the grip, and instantly the mountain man had him by the wrists.

"What'n —— you up to now, old man?" cried the doctor.

"You wait a minute. I ain't doing any harm to nobody," slowly warned Old Misery, without removing his gaze from the bartender's face. Then he leaned forward and whispered:

"Bullet or rope. Open winder behind you."

Still gripping the terrified man's wrists, he told the excited, surging crowd:

"His hands are still red. Both of 'em. He's rubbed 'em on a towel, but he couldn't git it off."

"We all know that, old man. Release him," warned the doctor.

"I'm used to reading signs," continued the mountain man. "He ain't washed his hands. He ain't emptied or washed the glass. But why did he bother to fetch the drink back to the bar when a man's dying, and how could he do it without color showing on the glass? It's clean as any glass in the bar. This feller lies when he says he tried to give Stacy a drink. Why did he lie? If he didn't use up any time trying to give the man a drink why wasn't he out on the street yelling for help? Yet his hands is bloody and he poured out this drink. He either poured it afore reddening his hands, or else there's a blood-marked bottle back of that bar now."

The crowd was now as quiet as the dead man. All eyes were focused on the old mountain man and his terrified prisoner.

Looking straight at the bartender, Old Misery continued:

"In this room this morning Stacy told me he had ready money at his store, lots of it; and that he wanted to buy into a mine I'd found up north. No one else was here but this drink-slinger. He heard it. Pretty Soon Jim was in t'other room, eating his breakfast. How do you know this feller didn't slip across the street and do for Stacy while 'twas gitting dark and you was all to supper? And why couldn't this feller git back here with the dust in his apron without being seen? Stacy crossed the street without being seen. I don't say it's so, but my idee is to look behind that bar and search this lodge from top to bottom afore we go gunning for Pretty Soon Jim Pipps.

"We can always find Pretty Soon; he's simple's a child. Now if this feller knifed Stacy and took the gold he left Stacy for dead. He got back here and poured himself a stiff snort of whisky without touching the glass, and just then Stacy staggers in. The storekeeper comes to git his gold back, perhaps thinking he'd find men here to who he could name his murderer. But he 'n' the murderer are alone. It's a question of minutes afore he goes over the divide. It took most of his strength to git here.

"This feller, if he's guilty, wanted Stacy dead afore any one come in. He waited till he believed Stacy was breathing his last. He told 'bout the liquor to fill in the time afore sounding the alarm. If he could 'a' been sure no one saw Stacy cross the street he'd never said anything about trying to give Stacy a drink. Now let's take a peek behind the bar."

And he released the man's wrists and vaulted over the bar and ducked below it. Almost at once his hand set a bottle, marked with dark finger-prints, on the bar. With a scream the bartender leaped through the window. A confusion of oaths and yells filled the room; and from behind the bar came a bag marked "Stacy," and another and another, until six had been exhumed from the litter on the floor. With the appearance of the first bag the men were crowding and jamming at the doorway, trying to take up the pursuit. With the recovery of the last bag the mountain man wheeled to the window, and, still kneeling, rested the long navy revolver across the sill.

The white shirt of the bartender showed vaguely as the man ran for the river. The mob erupted through the congested door and into the street, yelling and whooping like mad men. And the mountain man fired once and slowly got to his feet and slowly proceeded to arrange the stolen bags on the bar alongside the blood-stained bottle and the spotless glass.

Only the doctor had remained in the room. He said nothing until after he had gone back of the bar and had found a towel. There were dark marks on it. He examined them critically, and similar marks on the bags and on the bottle.

Then he announced:

"Same finger prints on the bags and the

bottle. Towel's blurred. They'll hang him even if his running away doesn't."

"They'll never hang him, poor feller!" muttered Old Misery. "If it wa'n't for some nuggets I paid in here Stacy would 'a' never told 'bout his dust, and the drink-slinger never'd heard him and then give away to a sudden notion to steal and kill."

"But they will hang him!" cried the doctor. "Hark! There! they've caught him now! They'll have him back here and strung up inside of ten minutes!"

The mountain man shook his head.

"No. They'll never hang him. I give him his choice of a rope or a bullet. He didn't want to choke to death."

And it was a dead man the men brought back with them.

CHAPTER VI

A NEW MEDICINE

OLD MISERY received a vote of thanks for his deadly marksmanship and was warmly urged to remain in town. But the tragedy weighed on him, and he stole away before the citizens missed him. He had crossed the river and climbed the stiff hill and had traveled some miles down winding Greenwood Valley before he remembered his dislike for the place. However, the bartender's ghost would not annoy him as it would hover around the hotel and Stacy's store.

His long walk that day beyond Coloma had tired him, he was now discovering as he depended upon his moccasined feet to keep the trail. He had intended to press on until he reached the little town of Greenwood, but surrendered to fatigue when halfway down the valley and turned into the timber back of a cabin and made his bed on the pine needles.

Ghosts or no ghosts he would sleep, he told himself; and, lulled by the crooning night breeze, he was soon unconscious. But there was a sentinel in his wary brain which never slept; and when he awoke he was sitting up, his hand on his rifle. He could discover nothing to cause alarm, and yet he knew it was time for him to be on guard against something. He dropped back and rested his head on the ground, and caught it—a faint *thudety, thud* of several horses coming at a hand gallop. Much relieved that he was to witness no manifestations of the supernatural, he threw aside his blankets and waited curiously.

The horsemen were riding easily and with no semblance of haste. They were coming from Coloma way and were neither pursuing nor being pursued. With Stacy's slayer dead there was no reason for a posse to be riding down the lonely valley at night; and honest wayfarers preferred the day. As the measured beat of hoofs sounded nearer Misery decided there were at the least four men in the band. Taking his rifle, he stole to a hiding place in some bushes close beside the cabin. Now he caught the murmur of voices, and instead of keeping up their pace the riders were slowing down to a walk. There was an aroma of burning tobacco. Misery prepared to fall back, thinking they might dismount and go into camp.

The newcomers' speech became audible, and he pricked his ears on hearing them talking in Spanish.

"Tomas said it was this cabin?" asked a voice as the dark blurs drew up opposite the empty shack.

"He swore it as he was drawing his last breath," a man replied. "The Tiger himself put the question. It would be a very brave *caballero* who would try to deceive the Mountain Tiger even if hiding in ——."

"Then dismount and search. We must be back in the hills before morning," commanded the leader.

Old Misery was keenly interested. Obviously Joaquin Murieta, of the black and yellow serape and the belt of four heavy dragoon revolvers, had sent some of his men to recover something from this cabin.

The first man afoot found pine branches and lighted them for torches, and by the smoky light Misery saw men on the ground and a fifth in the saddle. All were dressed in the barbaric finery of Old Mexico, their short coats being thickly decorated with gold or silver braid, from under which flowed the ends of red sashes, and there was much silver on the outside of each flaring trousers leg.

None was masked, but all were strangers to the mountain man. His interest was lively but impersonal. He was much like a child watching a game. Once on a time he had unwittingly saved Joaquin's life; and recently he had killed Scar Faced Luis, one of the most deadly members of the wild, merciless band.

Then he felt his white hair stirring, and an icy chill ran up and down his spine. For something had moved inside the cabin; and this was the spot where the fourth of the Lopez robbers had been hanged with the white cloth over his head. The sound was not such as a squirrel, or other small animal, would make, but a heavy, shuffling sound. He was surprized that none of the bandits had noted it.

The leader was asking—

"And Tomas surely said it was under the big pine?"

"His last words. Under the big pine where they hung the man from Hangtown. Between two roots on the side facing the cabin. We will dig."

Again that peculiar, dragging, shuffling sound, and the mountain man's nerves tightened. Only the thickness of the log wall was between him and It. Had it not been for the bandits to share in the situation, he would have stolen away, but their presence emboldened him to remain. The four men gathered at the foot of the big pine, three of them holding torches, the fourth armed with a pick. The work of digging commenced, the thud of the picking sounding very loud and distinct. Then the pick was cast aside, and the man was on his knees, exclaiming in triumph as he pawed out the loose dirt and exposed a stout bag of buckskin.

"Well done! Soon done!" cried the mounted leader.

"Here they are, all in a nest. This is the last, four in all," cried the man as he passed up the bags for his companions to take.

Like an echo sounded a hoarse, strangled cry in Old Misery's ears such as a man might make who was choking to death.

With sharp yelps of alarm the four men fell back from the tree, each carrying a bag, and made for their horses. The leader pulled a dragoon revolver from his sash and glared about in the fitful light afforded by the torches burning on the ground.

"It's in the cabin!" cried one of the men as he threw himself into the saddle.

The cry was repeated, and the door of the cabin swung in with many protesting squeaks. A fantastic figure lurched out, clawing at his neck and making hoarse, choked sounds. The body was white, the arms were white, and where there should have been a head was a smear of white.

The bandits cried out in fear.

One on foot screamed, "Son of the Fiend!" and hurled a blazing brand at the weird shape. "The man who was hung with the cloth on his head!"

And he fairly hurled himself on his horse and galloped back toward Coloma.

The leader shouted an excited blasphemy and fired point-blank at the figure, now groping its way toward the remaining men and still choking and clawing at the white throat.

"A dead man! Pity us and save us!" yelled the leader, wheeling his horse and racing off into the darkness.

The others streamed after him. Old Misery, crouching on his heels, tried to recall a strong ghost-medicine.

"You darned fools better let me alone!" warned the ghost. "Next man that tries any tricks'll be sorry."

"What the —— be you anyway?" asked Old Misery in a quavering voice and still keeping concealed behind a tree.

The figure picked up a torch and came toward the mountain man.

"Halt! Ghost or devil, I'll plug you if you come another step!"

"Why can't you get out of here and leave me be? You've played your prank; now be off," complained the ghost, and a fit of coughing held him speechless for a few moments.

Then he was adding—

"It's bad enough to fall into the flour and well nigh fill my lungs with the cussed stuff without having you fellers hooting round to pester me."

The twitching at the roots of Old Misery's hair ceased. Stepping from his hiding-place, he approached the spectral figure, snatched the torch from the limp hand and swung it around until it burst into radiant flames.

After a second's scrutiny he exclaimed:

"Cuss all cats if you ain't Pretty Soon Jim! And if you ain't a mess! But you're mighty *wakan* to be alive. That feller shot at you p'int-blank. I reckoned you was just *heyoka*, but you must be *wakan witshasha*."

"It's you, Misery. I can't see good yet, along of the flour in my eyes; but I know your voice. Why did they want to chase me and try their games on me for? That bartender, Jack, is back of it, I'll warrant."

"No. He ain't back of it," soberly corrected Old Misery. "The men were greasers, come to dig up something they'd hid in the ground. They belong to Joaquin's band."

With a squawk of terror Pretty Soon Jim started to run to the cabin, but tripped and fell headlong.

As he scrambled to his feet he cried:

"They'll be back! They're desperate, cruel men!"

"They're scared as —— just about this time. Drop that rock. Solid Comfort here can stand off a dozen of 'em."

But it was not a rock that Pretty Soon was holding in his hand.

He explained—

"I hit it with my foot and fell."

Old Misery lowered the torch and beheld one of the bags the bandits had taken from the ground at the foot of the big pine.

"—— 'n' sal'ratus powders!" gasped the mountain man admiringly. "Now I know you're *wakan witshasha!* First you dodge a bullet at fifteen feet; then you stub your toe against a bag of gold!"

"Gold? Good Lord! This is my third season of trying to find enough to pay my way back East! Let's have a peek at it. I was lucky at Coloma; then the bartender told me I'd lost, and took my dust away."

"No time to look at it now. Fetch your blankets and come with me. They'll miss that bag. That changes things. Even ghosts are better to face than Murieta when he's r'iled. He's expecting four bags. They found four. They won't dare go back and tell any ghost story. They've got to git that fourth bag. You carry it all the time seeing it's yours, and after we dig deep into the woods we'll have a powwow."

Pretty Soon quickly secured his blankets and followed Old Misery up the slope of the valley and into the pines.

He muttered under his breath:

"They sha'n't find us! They sha'n't take it from me!"

"A blind buf'ler could foller the flour trail you're leaving. We must clear out afore daylight," growled Misery.

"Before daylight I'll be on my way to the bay to buy a ticket home," declared Pretty Soon. "This bag is hefty. No one shall have it!"

"You're going with me to Nevada City and turn it into the 'spress office and find it waiting for you when you git home, you crazy loon," the mountain man informed him. "Now we'll squat, and you'll answer a few questions afore we turn in. Wish that little runt of a Tom Tobin was here."

"I'll tell you anything, Misery. I ain't forgetting that drink you bought me. That bartender took my dust. I didn't dare let on I remembered it, or he might 'a' stuck a knife into me. But I never gambled. He called me into a room up-stairs. There was a table and a pack of cards. He just yanked the bag away and said, 'You lost.' "

"Never mind the bartender. No good talking about him," uneasily interrupted Old Misery. "He's the big loser up to now. Let it go at that. But you broke your promise, Pretty Soon. Never believed you'd do it. You said you'd meet me at Stacy's store."

"Well, I declare!" exclaimed Pretty Soon. "But you sent the bartender to the store with word for me to come here and wait for you. I was to pack along a bag of flour and some other fixings. And I done it. You was to pay him for the grub before leaving Coloma to overtake me."

"*Heyoka* man, after all," sighed Misery. "Just like a child. What time did you see the bartender?"

"He came over right after dinner when Stacy was at the express office and I was tending store alone. Told me you said to start about four o'clock and to say nothing about my reasons for going to anybody. Then he give me the money to pay for the grub. Said you would settle with him."

"That part of it is right," mumbled the mountain man.

"There! You know all about it. I ought to ask you questions. Maybe I'm unjust toward Jack. He did give me a bottle to take with me; but he made me promise not to open it till I got here. And I kept my word. But that promise didn't hold when it come to drinking from a bottle I found in the store, and it must have been lots later 'n four o'clock when I woke up on the blankets. I was alone. Stacy was opening some express out back. So I just picked up a bag of flour and some fixings and sneaked off. How much gold in that bag, you 'spose?"

Old Misery weighted it in his hand and replied:

"Twenty-five hundred at a guess if it's in clean nuggets. But it don't feel like nuggets."

He untied the buckskin thong and dipped in his fingers.

"Feels like the fifty-dollar slugs that Moffat at Frisco puts out. They're yours. It's stuff that a feller named Tomas stole and hid without sharing with the gang. Told 'bout it when he was dying. Belongs to you. Can't prove ownership of coins when so much is being stolen out here. Time we was sleeping."

"I can't sleep for feeling so happy. All I can think of is that ticket home. I'll go by the way of the Isthmus. Fast steamers. Think of it! Only twenty-five days after leaving the bay and I'll be back East!"

His inability to compose his thoughts and sleep kept the mountain man awake some time, listening to a recital of disappointments and hardships and indignities.

Until he uncovered the pocket below Coloma he never had possessed more than enough gold to relieve his immediate wants. This night he was vindicating himself; he had never worked for any man except Jim Pipps. This bag of gold was the result of steadfastly refusing to work for wages. Finally his talk became incoherent mumbling, and the two slept.

The clock in Old Misery's head woke him up an hour before sunrise. He aroused his companion and dusted the flour from him the best he could and permitted a hurried examination of the bag. It contained fifty-four of Moffat's fifty-dollar slugs.

"Nough to get me home and buy a good farm!" ecstatically observed Pretty Soon.

Without waiting to eat breakfast the mountain man led the way to the mouth of the valley and around the dozen cabins, two stores, and hotel of Greenwood. Once beyond the town and noticing his companion was suffering severely from yesterday's liquor, Old Misery had him lie down in a juniper thicket. Taking the bag for safe-keeping, he returned to the town and bought meat and bread. News of the Coloma tragedy arrived, brought by a horseman, while he was completing his purchases.

Hastening back to the thicket, he found Pretty Soon still sleeping. Arousing him, he set out the food and urged the need of immediate departure.

Had he been traveling alone he would have worried none; but Pretty Soon Jim, as awkward to protect as he was conspicuous in appearance, was more of an encumbrance than a drove of cattle. Did he get at whisky at any camp he would be dangerously garrulous. And the men at Spanish Bar would be remembering the old man who had bought food with ledge gold. They would endeavor to detain him, at least to trail him. Old Misery arrived at two conclusions when he halted on the summit of the range overlooking the bar; he and his companion must keep ahead of the Coloma news, and he must avoid being recognized at the camp far below.

"Ever make this crossing afore?" he asked, pointing to the tents and huts at their feet.

"Late last season I come down this way to winter around Coloma."

"Listen. Here's two trade-dollers. Go down to the river and be set across. Without stopping to talk with any one you climb up t'other side and strike the trail to the Grizzly Bear House."

"I know the path," proudly broke in Pretty Soon. "Guess there's mighty few I don't know."

"Foller it. If I don't j'in you on the way I'll pick you up at the house. I'll carry the bag."

"But why quit me?"

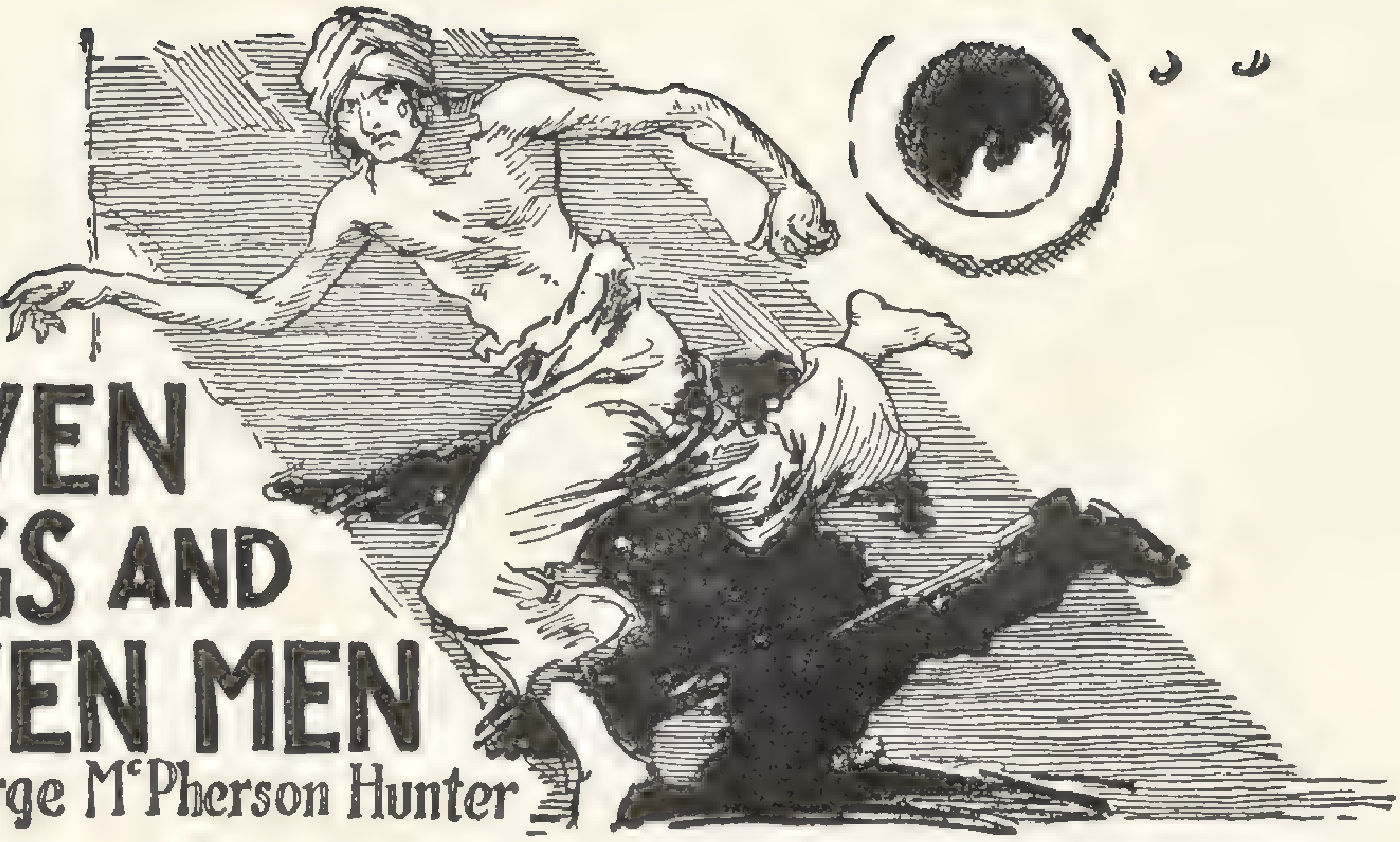
"We're being trailed by Old Man Trouble. My medicine tells me to make a wet crossing above the bar. With this bag and Solid Comfort it won't be any joke. You're not to take a drink till I overhaul you and give you the word."

"I promise," sighed Pretty Soon. "But it would be tough sledding if you never showed up."

"Sorter tough on me, too," grunted Old Misery. "Go ahead. You're bust. Just drifting round from camp to camp."

And he turned up the crest of the ridge as Pretty Soon plunged down the long, steep slope.

TO BE CONTINUED



SEVEN RUGS AND SEVEN MEN

by George McPherson Hunter

THE *City of Manila* of the City Line, carrying passengers and cargo between Calcutta and New York, lay chafing her black sides against Pier 35, North River, New York.

Seven of her lascar stokers had deserted the night before. The company's Swedish shipping-master had raked together some substitutes. Those who had stuck by the ship and their jobs refused to sail with the new men. The shipping-master was scouting around Brooklyn's Asiatic boarding-houses looking for another gang.

While waiting for them, Miller, the chief engineer, and McGregor sahib, the ship's doctor, were walking the deck. Dr. McGregor, Calcutta born, steeped in Indian ways, fluent in some of their tongues, was giving the chief a possible reason for the lascars' objections to the substitutes.

The stokers were Sunnites, Arabic Mohammedans, owing allegiance to the Sultan of Turkey. And the men brought aboard were Shiites, Indian Mohammedans. The Arabic crowd, fanatical and clannish, wanted their own kind.

A servant interrupted, handing the chief a note.

"Got them!" he announced laconically, after reading it.

Leaving the surgeon, he hurried to the captain's room.

"They're here, Captain Dawson."

"Lascars?"

"Sure! Do you think I'd take Irish? Mohammedans and Irish. Gosh, what a mixture! It's steam, not fightin', we'll want at sea. The *City o'*——"

"All right! All right!" Dawson said testily. "Get them aboard! We've lost three hours."

The chief hurried over the gangway toward the dock gates, where the shipping-master stood in the open gateway, his back to the street and the men in front of him—a strategic position, handy if any of the men took a notion to back out and escape into West Street.

"Come on now, boys!" the gateman was volubly urging the natives. "Open up! It's me orders."

Seven dark-skinned lithe young lascars, with Arabic cast of features, stood looking at the bulky guardian. His club, symbol of authority, dangled ominously from his wrist. Ignorant of his language, they stared at him with incurious eyes and faces of unsearchable calm.

At the sight of Miller's uniform they saluted.

"*Salaam*, Engineer sahib!"

"It's them bundles, chief," explained the gateman, "the rags below their arms. Me orders are to watch and search crews on vessels goin' east'ard. Somethin' doin' out yonder. I've seen their kits." He pointed to the meager outfits lying at their feet. "But them dirty bundles below their oxters, they'll not let me touch them, sur!"

"Seven Rugs and Seven Men," copyright, 1923, by George McPherson Hunter.

Pointing to the "rags," Miller ordered sharply—

"Bundles *mallow!*" in his limited Hindustani.

Their arms tightened over them.

"Heesht ye fast noo! Let gateman keek inside." He showed by mute action his order. "Take look, see!"

Their refusal was respectful, firm and final.

Miller, annoyed and puzzled at their attitude, stood looking at the lascars. If they disobeyed orders on the dock, what would they do at sea?

"Can I be of any service?" said a voice with an Oxford accent.

Miller turned to see who spoke and faced an elderly man, tall, thin, gray-haired, ascetic visaged, with faded blue eyes. He looked like a college professor on leave, an incongruous figure in the ugly vaulted dock shed.

"I am one of your passengers."

"Oh! Are ye?"

"Yes. Ames is my name."

"Weel, Mr. Ames, if ye speak the *bat*, tell these chaps to open their bundles or go tae the —— oot o' this!"

With quiet ease Ames addressed the lascars in their own tongue.

The transformation was astonishing. The seven natives broke into speech. They all talked at once, eyes flashing in anger, hands gesticulating in unanimous, shrill, discordant protest.

When Ames succeeded in calming them he explained that the bundles were prayer rugs, and it was against Mohammedan customs to allow unbelieving hands to touch them.

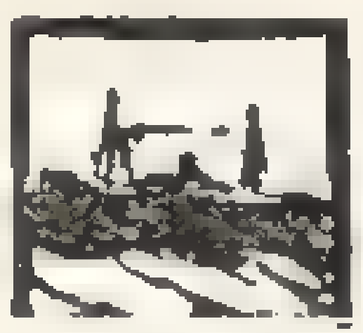
"Prayer rugs!" cried the dock man. "Ain't they heathens?"

"Oh, no!" Ames smiled at the question. "Mohammedans, Sunnites, the strictest sect. They pray five times a day and use rugs for kneeling at prayer. Let them pass, officer! It's not wise to interfere with Oriental religious customs."

"Sure, no!" the gateman answered with expansive generosity. "I ain't strict myself. A mouthful o' prayers in the mornin's me limit. If them poor black guys can't pray without rugs below their knee-bones it's not me that'll be hinderin' them."

With a wave of his club, the dockman said:

"Gawn! Chase yourselves aboard, boys. Say a Christian prayer for me once in a while!"



WHEN the *City of Manila* was three days at sea, Captain Dawson handed Chief Miller some circular letters and printed instructions from Washington, D. C., and the Admiralty in London, wherein ships carrying Oriental crews were warned of the unrest and danger in Mediterranean, Indian and Persian Gulf ports, where Mohammedans were prominent and had influence.

Turkey's defeat and humiliation had shaken the Moslem world and stirred the leaders of the faithful into action. Her sudden rally and stab back at Greece had given courage and hope to the Moslem hierarchy. Followers of Mohammed were being urged to preserve the faith of the Green Banner.

Mussulman agents disguised as sailors, stokers and ship servants were carrying seditious, inflammatory literature and proclamations barred by the mails, stirring up trouble and fomenting hate.

Captains trading from Western ports and even those on the Pacific coast were advised to keep their crews aboard at ports of call, to prevent desertions, to watch for suspicious gatherings and report any unusual movements among lascar seamen, stokers and ship stewards.

"There's the orders, Mr. Miller," said Dawson, handing him a sheaf of printed instructions. "Search your department. It looks as if the Government had cause for uneasiness."

Without much delay the chief engineer summoned Ditta Malla, his trusted head *serang*, in charge of the Asiatic stokers and the "go-between" who carried out his orders. They had sailed together for years.

"Weel, *serang!* How's the new crowd we shipped in New York doin', them Sunnies?"

"Sunnies, Miller sahib?"

"Aye! Do ye no ken your own deenomination!"

"Deenomination?" Ditta Malla repeated in bewilderment.

"Sunnites, then, if ye're so —— particular!"

The *serang* shook his head and said suavely:

"Engineer sahibs are all Heaven-born. God made them protectors of the poor. Ah, Miller sahib! The weak-backed worshipers of the Cow [Hindoos] fear the black waters." He spat in scorn. "It is known the followers of the Prophet make good steam."

"Aye, ye make smells and dirt—tae—an' heaps o' trouble in the world. Listen! The *peria dorai* [big master] in Washington and the king-emperor in London say: 'Search the crew's quarters of all vessels trading in Indian ports for books, letters, papers of a seedeetious nature and report to the consuls all suspicious persons.' "

"*Sahibs* are full of wisdom."

"Aye, man, an' their laws full o' teeth! *Sahibs'* laws bite."

"*Sahibs* are men of strength."

"Let your lips be closed. Dinna speak! Act!"

"*A cha, sahib.*"

Eastern ways are devious and mysterious. What Ditta Malla said or did, how or why his subordinates fought him, no man knows. But when he reported at the chief's room a few days later, he was limping and his head was bandaged.

"Fightin', eh? How many hurt?"

"The world is full of evil, Miller sahib!"

"An' the East full o' rascals! Why do ye no shut your fists like Christians when ye fight? Your face is full o' scratches! Scratchin' like fishwives! Ugh! What did ye find out?"

"By the Holy Tomb, Engineer sahib, the doers of evil against the king's Government are among the spawn of crows who cook food for the *mem-sahibs* (ladies). Makers of steam are men of virtue. No man of evil heart shovels coal. True words!"

Chief Miller, when handing his noon-day log abstract to the captain, assured him neither suspicious literature nor characters were harbored in his department that he could see.

"My stokers are verra releegious in their ain way," he chuckled. "Never drink, swear or look at the lassies in foreign ports; say their prayers five times a day, mind ye, kneelin' on wee broon mats!"

About midnight the chief saw something that made him mentally amend his good report. While standing at the after end of the promenade which overlooked the lower deck reserved for the natives, he saw a European come out of their quarters. The bulkhead light was bright enough for him to distinguish the figure of the man but not the face. He knew it was none of the engineers or deck officers. It could not be Dr. McGregor, for he had seen him but a few minutes before.

Race feeling and ship rules forbade any mingling with the natives. With the Government warning in his mind, Miller became at once suspicious.

"Something in the wind," he reasoned. "I'll keep my weather eye lifted."

The following evening he walked aft when the passengers had retired and waited until four bells struck. Again he saw a European, resembling in figure the one he had seen the night before, emerge from the companionway that led down to the stokers' quarters.

In the hope of interrupting him Miller hurried below and along Corridor D which opened on to the crew's deck. He looked into all the shadowy places, where a man might hide, but found no one. Then he went to the crew's entrance and shoved his head inside. Heat, fetid smells and excited talk bubbled up.

"Somethin' brewin'," the chief muttered as he went to his room.

A few days later, Miller encountered Ames on the 'tween decks, talking to the natives. They were squatted around a large platter heaped with white rice fringed with yellow curried meat.

"Clashin' wae ma men, Mr. Ames?"

"I—I—don't understand, Mr. Miller."

"Gossipin' then. Where did you learn the *bat?*"

"Mohammedans interest me," replied Ames, avoiding the chief's question. "Supermen of the East. Excitable, you know; rather fanatical."

"Oh, they're no bad chaps, if a body keeps his hand on them, but the ——'s ain bairns when they break loose! Indian Government fears a risin'. Did you know that?" Miller asked, looking sharply at him.

"Well, they overran Europe once," Ames replied. "They man the merchant ships of the East. A holy war could be waged on sea and land."

"Oh, pshaw!" exclaimed Miller. "We could handle them at sea."

"Several ships!" said Ames. "The *Irish Prince* was the last one to vanish at sea, off Aden!"

"Naebody that kens ship and lascars thinks the natives sank her."

"There are nasty rumors about her loss—and suspicious circumstances," Ames answered slowly.

Before the chief could reply he walked away.

Puzzled at the man's abrupt departure, secretive manner and his talking to the Asiatics, Miller began to suspect Ames might be the crew's visitor.

Early that evening, to catch him if possible when he entered, instead of when he was leaving the crew's quarters, the chief took his place at the observing point. It was nearly eleven when, to his surprize, he saw the European come out of the companionway, seemingly in a big hurry.

Miller darted below, through Corridor D, the quickest way, to meet him. He found the corridor empty. The European had entered one of the state-rooms.

Miller went directly to the captain's room and reported the visits and his suspicions to Captain Dawson.

"What's he up to?" Dawson asked.

"I'm thinkin' he has something to do wae this Mohammedan literature."

"If so," said the captain, "we'd better catch him going or coming to the crew's quarters. It's a nasty thing to accuse a man unless we are certain. And searching a passenger's room raises a devil of a rumpus."

Miller pondered a few moments, then said—

"I'll try quietly myself and find out."

"Do!" responded Dawson.

NEXT day the Chief looked over the passenger list and found Ames occupied a room in Corridor D. He rang for the electrician and told him to bring some fuse-plugs and the keys to the corridor switch-boxes.

After lunch the engineer strolled on deck, watched the passengers gathered there and counted them. They were all up on deck, walking, reading, playing shuffle-board, except three, Ames included. He found him and the other two in the smoking-room.

He then went below to Corridor D, opened the fuse and switch-boxes, took out the fuses and pulled out the switch. Entering all the state-rooms in the corridor, he opened the covering globes, slacked back the electric bulbs inside and sauntered back to his room, whistling softly, "Comin' through the Rye."

At sunset, when the dynamos were started, Miller sat in his cabin, waiting. Soon slippered, shuffling Dharma Das, steward of Corridor D, appeared before the chief's door. His turban was all awry.

"Engineer *sahib*, no lights!

"Three *sahibs*, very angry, say '—— —— —— no lights!' They call their servant mahogany head. '*Soora* (pig) servant!' "

"Verra, verra improper!"

"Yes. Engineer *sahib!* The ancient lean one, red in the face, threw his boot at his servant, who is clean of heart and has served with virtuous *sahibs* before."

"Aye, aye, Dharma Das. This is a hard world for virtuous men. Let's see your trouble."

He took the electric torch and, followed by Dharma Das, went down the corridor, replaced the fuses and threw the switch. As the passage-way lit up and the state rooms remained dark, two passengers opened their doors and complained that the rooms were in darkness.

To adjust their lights Miller stood on a chair in the middle of the floor space. That gave him a chance to survey the berth racks and beds.

He had finished the job when Ames came through the corridor. Hearing that the lights were out in all the rooms, he asked the chief to look at his. Miller's eyes gleamed sharply below his shaggy eyebrows as he stepped inside, mounted a chair, took down the cover and screwed the globe into the socket. When the light filled the room Ames lifted a brown satchel and began with furtive haste to scoop into it some papers lying loose on the bed. One dropped to the floor.

Miller stepped down from the chair and planted both feet on it, remarking—

"Verra convenient room ye have!"

"Excuse me, chief, you are standing on one of my papers!"

"Oh, pardon me!" And he stepped aside.

Ames picked the paper up.

"That's an Indian language," remarked the chief.

"Eh—yes," Ames answered, thrusting the paper into his pocket.

He threw the satchel up on the rack.

At dinner, the chief watched until Ames was seated. Then he got up from the table and made for Corridor D. He went to Ames' room. Up in the rack he saw the satchel. He pulled it down, but on opening it found it empty. He searched the drawers and the cabin trunk. None of them had any books or papers in any other language than English.

"Well, well!" he exclaimed. "If that old fox hasn't made short work o' all that stuff! What's he done wi' it?"

Convinced he was on the track of something, Miller continued his vigil. A few nights later, he saw two natives slip stealthily out on deck. One went to the port, the other to the starboard rail. Two others followed; looking furtively about. Miller drew back as they changed positions to watch the upper deck. Evidently satisfied that no one saw them, they disappeared under the shadow of the fore-deck house.

"Noo's my chance," said Miller, "to find what's afoot!"

He hastened below. As he stepped inside the stairway faintly he heard a hissing—"Is—is—ss—ss!"—sounded twice. He halted and listened, then went softly downstairs. The sound was repeated, when his foot touched the deck. It came from somewhere above and was answered. Again he stopped, but heard nothing except the vibration of the engines and the familiar groaning of the ship's structure.

He went cautiously down Corridor D, straight out on deck and forward to where the natives had disappeared. The deck was empty.

He descended into the men's quarters. By the dim night light in the roof he saw them lying in the careless attitudes of men sound asleep. He counted them. They were all present except the men on watch.

Miller reported the occurrence to the captain.

"Better ask McGregor," said he, "to look into this business. He understands all the sneaky ways of these natives."

Miller lost no time. He cornered the surgeon after dinner and told him what he had seen and his suspicions.

"So you think Ames is the visitor?" the doctor asked, lighting a cheroot and lying back in his chair.

"Well, he speaks the *bat* and had papers in the vernacular in his room."

"Missionary, perhaps."

"Missionary, naw! Heard him swear."

"Student, Orientalist," suggested McGregor.

"Maybe. That's more like it.

"Was the paper you saw like this?" McGregor asked, handing him a thin sheet of rice paper printed in the East Indian language.

"Aw!" Miller growled. "Thae hieroglyphics a' look alike tae me! What language is that?"

"Arabic."

"The papers in Ames' room were shaped like a half-moon."

"Crescent shape?"

Miller nodded and added—

"Why would he have papers in an Eastern language?"

"Hundreds of Europeans read native literature," replied McGregor. "Indian Civil servants are masters of Hindustani."

"But," Miller persisted, "why did he destroy them? Not a scrap left when I searched his room!"

McGregor laughed.

"Turning amateur detective, chief?" he asked quizzically.

"Naw! —— a bit o' me. Tryin' to prevent trouble among my men. You watch that Ames fellow!"

The *City of Manila* was nearing Gibraltar. It was two nights after his talk with the surgeon. Miller had been visiting Captain Dawson in the chart-room. He decided before going below to have a last look at the lower deck. His watchfulness had not yielded him any information, although he still suspected Ames.

The night was blustery, and the stars hidden. A heavy beam sea shook the old vessel as she rolled in the trough of the waves. Walking was difficult. The engineer stood peering aft into the black darkness. He was leaning against the rail, directly over the doorway of Corridor D, when he saw a figure coming out. This time it was making its way to the crew's quarters instead of from them.

Quickly as his years, shortness of breath, weight and the unsteady ship allowed the chief made his way below. At the entrance of Corridor D he stopped out of breath. On recovering, he started down the narrow passageway, arms stretched out to balance himself.

Without waiting for a fair slant he left the corridor, making straight across the deck for the crew's entrance. The heaving ship made him stagger. He missed the door and slid down the wet deck until he caught a stanchion. With his arms around it he waited the next roll of the vessel, then ran down the sloping deck. When he was within three feet of the door it snapped shut.

Miller hammered with his fists on the panel and shouted. No answer came to his ears, and the sea smothered his cries.

"Weel, if I'm oot, you're in!" he roared. "Trapped!"

He ran back down the corridor and tried Ames' door. It was shut. On the way to the surgeon's room he put his head into the fifth engineer's room and ordered him to stand by the 'tween deck entrance to the crew's quarters.

"Let no one out!"

"Quick, McGregor!" he called to the surgeon a minute later. "He's trapped! I've nabbed him!"

The two men made their way to the crew's deck entrance. They found the dim deck light extinguished, so they stood for a few moments looking into the darkness, waiting for a fair slant. Miller caught a faint suggestion of one of the unmistakable odors of the East, indicating the proximity of a native. Both heard a scuffle and the quick *flip-flap* of bare feet on the wet deck. They started in the direction of the companionway leading down to the natives' forecastle.

Very distinctly they heard the door open and by the light that shot into the darkness they saw a native dart inside.

McGregor reached out to grab him, but the lurching ship made the doctor stagger and he missed. The same motion of the vessel sent the engineer sliding through the darkness down the sloping deck. He slipped, fell and slid on all fours toward the rail. On landing in the slushy scuppers he struck something soft. Putting out his hands where he lay, he felt clothing.

"Hey, McGregor! Here's somebody lyin' in the scuppers!"

The doctor, hurried by the ship's motion, came down out of the darkness, struck the rail with his hands, bent down and groped with his fingers over the body.

Between them the two men lifted the limp form; with legs wide apart to steady themselves, they staggered along the heaving deck and down below to the surgery.

The arms were bound tightly against the body and the legs tied together by strips of broad yellow, dirty calico. The wrappings made the body resemble an Egyptian mummy. Over the head something like a linen sack had been pulled, drawn tight with cords and tied. A pungent odor rose from it.

Dr. McGregor cut the cords around the neck and pulled the sack over the head, showing the pale face of Ames. His left cheek was stained by a thin blood streak from a wound on the temple.

"Send for Captain Dawson," said McGregor, cutting the wrappings from the limbs of Ames. "See if all your men are in their quarters."

Miller sent his boy for Captain Dawson; then he worked his way back to the crew's deck and found the door wide open. He descended, and by the central light saw the lascars sleeping quietly in the most natural positions. He counted them. All present except the men on watch!

Miller passed out by the lower door, released the engineer of his guard and returned to the surgery. Captain Dawson and McGregor were bending over the unconscious man, who was muttering and babbling incoherently in a mixture of English and Hindustani.

"What's he saying?" Miller asked.

"No coherence to his talk," McGregor replied.

Ames ceased speaking and lay still. In half an hour he was dead.

The captain was seriously disturbed over the murder. It was bad for him, the company and their reputation. His passengers would be alarmed, and the white officers would be unduly severe on the crew, producing discontent and trouble.

McGregor advised the immediate removal of the body to the state-room.

"Give heart failure as the cause of his death," said the doctor. "That's ambiguous enough. I'll write a medical report for your log."

On searching the baggage of Ames they discovered letters and papers showing he was in the ubiquitous secret service of the British Indian Government. He had visited the Mediterranean ports frequented by lascars and populated by Mohammedans, seeking information about the clandestine circulation of inflammatory literature carried by seamen. His mission explained his secret visits to the crew's quarters.

McGregor sahib, at Captain Dawson's request, started investigating. He examined and cross-examined the native stewards, sailors and stokers. Those off duty, sleeping in the quarters, swore by Allah's beard they were innocent. Ames sahib visited them twice, they admitted, "talked like a *sahib with* understanding. Some young *sahibs* had sick minds and halting tongues; not so Ames sahib. But a man's life! It is here! It is there! It is gone, by the will of God."

Ditta Malla had been on watch when the murder was committed. His rank as *serang* gave him a room apart from the stokers. He swore by Allah he knew nothing about Ames and his visits to the crew. With Oriental fatalism he declared:

"We die, *sahib*. It is the will of God. *Sahibs'* wisdom goes no further."

"Ay, sometimes! But it wasna the will o' God for Ames sahib to be murdered. Queer men of virtue you keep," Miller taunted.

"Men of evil heart are found among the *sahibs*."

"Maybe. But they don't stab in the dark; do they?"

"True speech, Engineer sahib! But my hands are clean."

"Your men are wolves—attack in the dark."

"By the beard of the Prophet, by the Cow, as the Hindoos swear—by Dam-Hella, the sea-god of the *sahibs*, I am innocent!"

"McGregor sahib, he'll find the *soora* (pigs) o' —— wha killed the *sahib* that spoke yer misbegotten tongue! No man can escape the eyes of McGregor sahib."

"McGregor sahib is wise. His ox-eyes look into the secrets of the heart, if it's the will of God."

"Ditta Malla," said Miller impressively, "tell your butties McGregor sahib is wiser than all men."

"Great is the wisdom of McGregor sahib!"

"By certes, everybody on board knows that! He keeps the 'eye-o'-God' (X-ray) in a box. You saw him use it when the oiler broke his arm."

"True speech, *sahib!*"

"Ditta Malla, no *sahib* is wiser than the doctor. He sees more than the king-emperor's police."

WITHIN twenty-four hours the *City of Manila* steamed into Gibraltar harbor and anchored under the shadow of the rock.

Miller went ashore and returned. He then ordered the lascars into the boats with all their belongings. They were led to the port surgeon's examination room. A large, whitewashed empty space, lit by a dazzling incandescent light in the center of the roof.

The natives were huddled in a corner of the room, guarded by Ditta Malla, when Commander Dawson and the surgeon entered.

Dr. McGregor lined them up across the floor and took his stand about ten feet from the line, folded his arms and looked steadily through his tortoise-shell framed glasses at every man.

Their enigmatic eyes met his, unafraid. An emotional silence filled the big white room.

The tenseness was broken by McGregor shifting the end men and waving Ditta Malla to the one side. Then he passed down the line, examining their eyes and tongues, pausing occasionally to look with searching scrutiny into the faces of some, as if trying to read the thoughts behind the dark skin.

He resumed his place, folded his arms again and looked steadily at the men for a long time.

Miller watched, confident McGregor was leading up to something, wondering what the natives thought. Their inscrutable dark faces showed neither fear nor interest.

Quickly, still keeping his eyes on the line, McGregor drew from his pocket a package of pale green envelops. Taking cards from his other pocket, he inserted one in each envelop. For the first time Miller detected a faint quiver of interest pass over the natives.

McGregor said something in Hindustani. The natives put out their right hands. He passed along and laid an envelop in every open palm.

A long, nerve-racking pause followed. In the stillness Miller heard the far-away bugle call on a man-of-war across the harbor and the buzz of insects' wings round the light overhead.

McGregor collected the envelops, examined them closely and dropped them at his feet. Then he took another package, ordered the hands extended and passed down the line again.

Another long, trying wait followed before McGregor began tolling out in Hindustani in deep, somber tones that rolled and echoed through the empty spaces of the hall—

"One—two—three," on up to twenty-four.

Then he stopped, walked rapidly up and down the line, watching the lascars moisten the gummed flaps of the envelops with their tongues. One by one he pulled a man out of the line until seven stood apart.

Miller glanced significantly at Ditta Malla, nodded his head and scowled at the seven Sunnites, shipped in New York.

Dr. McGregor stood up in front of them, searching their faces with a deadly scrutiny that stabbed through their masks of reserve. He was intimidating them. Beads of perspiration stood out on their foreheads. Their knees sagged. Terror convulsed their passive faces. Their eyes bulged and rolled.

Hands twitched and feet moved. The secrets of their souls began to cry for speech. The oldest groaned. Then in deep Arabic gutturals they all moaned—

"*E—E—Ah—Ah!*"

Fear had driven every other emotion out of their quaking souls.

McGregor drew from his inside pocket some thin, crinkling rice papers, printed in Oriental characters. Miller recognized by their crescent cut and peculiar shade of green they were similar to the documents he had seen in the murdered passenger's room.

McGregor held them before the seven men. At the sight of them the mournful Arabic wail, "*E—E—Ah—Ah!*" increased.

McGregor gave an order in Hindustani.

They shrank back and huddled together like sheep before a storm.

He repeated the order sternly. Like men walking to their doom they crossed to where the baggage was piled.

"Now," said Dr. McGregor, speaking for the first time in English, "we will find out what Ames was murdered for."

The seven trembling lascars lifted their prayer rugs, parted the thick blue fringes with their thin, claw-like fingers and pulled hard. Taut threads ripped and snapped as they tore the rugs apart.

Two rugs had been stitched together and between them papers had been carefully folded. They fell out, littering the floor, and the bold outline of the characters they were printed in was easily seen in the bright light. Duplicates in cut and color of those McGregor held in his hands.

"What are they?" Captain Dawson asked.

"Proclamations," replied McGregor, "in Arabic, Coptic, Hindustani, Persian, calling on the followers of Mohammed to unite. The Moslem priests have been flooding the ports of the East with these appeals. Ames was one of many Indian Government agents trying to discover how it was done."

"Oh, I see!" said Dawson. "The natives suspected him and were throwing him overboard."

"Yes," answered McGregor. "Perhaps he gave himself away with his zeal."

He opened the door, called in the police and they marched the seven trembling lascars away.

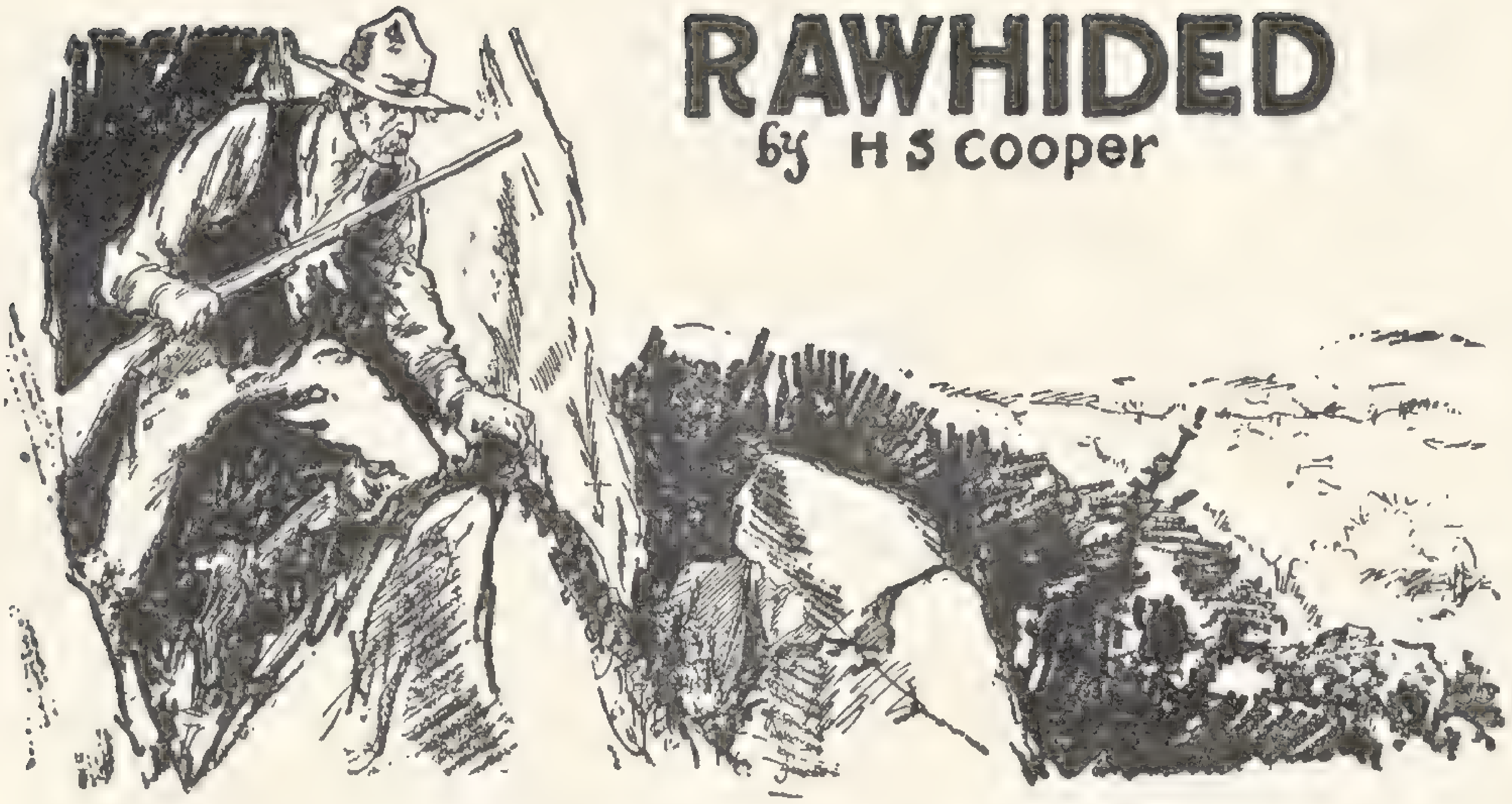
"But, doctor," the engineer asked in surprize, "how does it come you have these proclamations?"

McGregor laughed.

"I am in the Indian Government secret service also. Departmental blundering is probably responsible for two agents on one ship. I was watching those fellows. Ames was a linguist of great repute, but evidently without the slightest knowledge of how to approach the Indian mind."

"Was that the meaning," Dawson interrupted, "of that stamp-licking show business?"

"Oh, you have to stage things, appeal to the pageant sense of the Oriental. A lascar's self-control is very baffling. It's hard to find out what is going on behind their inscrutable faces. But they are human. These men were afraid their literature would be discovered, afraid because they murdered Ames. Most likely their chief dread was that one of their number would turn traitor. Besides their anxiety about what we knew. The strain of smothering all these fears was considerable and affected them physically, parched their tongues, dried up the saliva in their mouths. They hadn't enough moisture to wet the mucilage on the stamps. They betrayed themselves!"



RAWHIDED

by H S Cooper

Author of "Back to the Soil" and "Atmosphere"

SPEAKING of rawhiding, did I ever tell you about Bob and Frisco? No? Well, it all began about Willy-yam. You see the old man and Ma Stuart didn't have any children and never had had any and they wanted some blooded-kinfolks to leave the ranch and things to. All the relations they had was some cousins which were about as well-heeled financially as the old man was, and a couple of nevvys, one on the old man's side and one on Ma Stuart's side. It come out later that they sent for these boys to come out and spend some time on the ranch so as to get a line on them and see if they was worth leaving the business to.

The first one to come, in the early Spring was Ma Stuart's nevvy—and you ought to have seen that critter! He was tall and flat-chested and he wore those black-rimmed goggles—though his sight was as good as mine—and they made him look like a cross between an owl and a crane. He had a voice like the old chuck-wagon mule, all chest notes shoved through the nose, and he was always a-using it, you never could get out of the sound of it.

His name was William but he pronounced it "Willy-yam" and we let it go at that. We'd have forgiven him all this because he was kin to Ma Stuart and probably couldn't help his looks, and we'd have been nice to him if he'd acted human, but it wasn't in him! He was as meddlesome as a trade-rat, he poked his homely nose into all our affairs and nothing about them seemed to satisfy him. He took on most awful about what he called our "morrills" and was lecturing one or the other of us all day long.

The mildest kind of a cuss-word give him a crimp like the colic, all spirituous refreshment was either "rum" or "Satan's hell-broth" and a little innocent game of seven-up or draw-poker, penny ante and a two-bit limit, would send him into spasms of braying till we had to do all our card-playing behind the buildings in the horse lot. He sure got to be pizen to all of us and I reckon he did to the old folks too, for he didn't stay long. I heard that the old folks give him a big check and let it go at that.

After that one experience in nevvys we weren't anxious to see any more of them, but we knowed that the old man's nevvy was due soon and we sent Mustard, our foreman, to interview the old man about him. We told him to tell the old man that Willy-yam as a sample of nevvys was about all he ought to expect us to stand for the wages he was paying us and would he please, sir, let us know something about the other nevvy so as we could sort of heel ourselves against him.

Mustard brings us this news, to-wit:

"The old man tells me," he says, the "fol-followin' harrowin' details. He's coming out in about a week or two and he's coming to stay an' I'm to tell you fellows so!"

"Did he give you any points as to his size or age or color or gait or habits?" says I.

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"I asked him," says Mustard. "I asked him was he anything like Willy-yam and he says: 'William wasn't a patch on Robert!' That boy'll have you all righteous and pure inside of a month or I don't know you and him."

Well, that made the boys fairly foam at the mouth; they allowed they liked the ranch and the chuck and the pay and could even stand Mustard another year but that if there were any more freak relations shoved onto them there'd be trouble for him! And the old man just laughed!

So, when word come a week or so after, that Robert had arrived that day while we was all out on fence work, there was a full congregation at the bull-pen after supper; we wanted to see just what could be worse than Willy-yam and still walk on its hind legs.

Pretty soon the old man comes around the corner with his nevvy and the boys took one good look at him, breathes out a long sigh of relief and says "Sold!" My aunt! He sure was some different from his cousin! He was tall, had shoulders on him like an ox-yoke, head well set up and laughing brown eyes that looked you square in the face.

The old man come on with his eyes all a-twinkling just to think how nice he'd fooled us, and he says, and he says it sort of proud-like—

"Boys, this is my nephew, Bob, and I want you to be nice and easy with him at first, as he's fresh from the East and somewhat puny from overstudying at athaletics!"

And Bob he grins at this and comes up and shakes hands all round. Me being nearest, I shoves out my hand and says, "Glad to meet you, Mr. Bob!" and he says, "Drop the 'Mister' and I'll say the same to you." And he proceeds to shake hands.

Jumping Jehoshaphat! He had a grip like a vise and I knew that my little paddy-paw'd be out of commission for some minutes—but I made no sign, I just swallowed hard and stuck it out. I thought as to what was in store for the rest of the boys and I didn't want to spoil the fun for there was one of them that I was specially laying for. And, first off I was some disappointed. I could see that they got the grip all right, but they acted the same as me and I soon tumbled to it; their thought was the same as mine—"Frisco."

He was not long come among us, don't know where the old man picked him up but he was one bad *hombre!* The best cow-puncher, bronco-buster and all-around cattle-man I ever saw, and that's saying a lot and only giving him his due along those lines, but outside of that he was mean in his ways, sullen in his looks, ugly in his talk, close, stingy and mean in his habits. Outside he was a good looker in a dark way, but he was all bad inside like one of those apples of Sodom and Tomorrow that Willy-yam used to liken us to.

He had just such a grip as Bob's, for he was powerful built, but he sure used it for pure meanness. Nothing filled his cup of joy so full as to get holt of some greenhorn tenderfoot's hand, tighten up on the grip a hole at a time until the fellow went to his knees and then he'd ask him what was the matter with him! So, you can see why we all thought "Frisco" and stood Bob's handshake without giving it away.

Frisco was hanging back to the last with that mean, sneering look on his face and we could see that he was thinking how he was going to make Bob squirm and look small. The instant that they struck hands I noticed Bob look at him a little closter than he had at the rest of us, shift his feet a little, square his shoulders, sort of stiffen the muscles under his jaw—and we knew the fight was on. It didn't last long. Frisco had found more than his match; his sneering look changed to surprize, then to what the boys call the "dry grins," then the grin faded and he looked solemn, then mad, then wild and, almost before we knew it, his right knee curled under him and I heard Bob say, low and quiet—

"Enough?"

And Frisco answers him mean and vicious—

"Yes—for this time!" and I knew that Bob had made an enemy as dangerous as a rattler, and that there would be trouble if Frisco ever got a chance to strike.

I kind of think that it all might have blown over by Frisco playing some sort of mean trick on Bob and making him look small and so getting what he would call even with him. But, as usual "*Chassay lar fam!*" as Mustard used to say when he come back from home with a black eye or a scratched face, and the "fam" chassayed into the matter right away!

She was sort o' kinfolks, a long way off, to Ma Stuart, and she'd got run down in health and spirits teaching school in some little place next-door-to-nowhere out in the sticks and Ma heard about it and that was just twice enough to set that big old heart of hers a-working. So the girl got an invite out to the ranch, a ticket and all the extras was sent to her and me to meet when she arrived.

SHE sure was puny-looking, just nothing but skin, bones, hair and a pair of big, appealing, blue eyes. She commenced to pick up right away, Ma Stuart fed her at meals, between meals, just before she went to bed and as soon as she waked in the morning, for she believed in feeding—that was one thing that made the hands satisfied. Yet Hing, the Chinese cook, was no slouch with his kitchen tools and he had free swing to feed us. And as soon as she could stand it, Bob or Ma took her out in the buckboard, and when she got stronger I broke a little old gentle cow pony to suit her and she and Bob used to take rides all over the ranch.

Well, sir, the way that girl put on flesh and looks was a caution! I had to go west for a month to buy some grade cattle for the old man and when I come back I scarcely knowed her; form all nicely filled out, face blushing at its own good looks, she sure graded A-1 Select, and all the boys thought so too. Instead of blowing in their wages on Joe's red-eye, dance-hall dames and gambling it appeared that just as soon as they got their pay after the girl came they hit the trail for the Depot, hot-foot and in a bunch.

They put up their hosses at the Circle Y corral and then each one saunters off sort of careless until they was out of sight of one another and in a few minutes they was all sneaking into the Bon Ton Gents' Emporium of Fashion. And, it seems as they sort of chatted around promiscuous and Lord knows whether they wouldn't have stayed there all night only Big Bill picks out a purple neckerchief with green stripes on it and yeller spots on the stripes, one of these staggering ones, and it seems that they all had their eye on it, and there was nearly a fight, and it was only calmed by Ike Lavinsky, the proprietor, agreeing to auction it off.

But it wasn't any good! Nora—her front name was really Honoria but she didn't use all of it—Nora played no favorites no matter how adorned they was nor how that set the lilies of the field to blushing. She was just a good fellow with all of them and when some of the boys would reach the spooning stage and want to hold hands she'd laugh at them so sweet and funny and knowing that it just bowled over all their romantics.

All but Frisco. That *hombre* got plumb crazy-wild over her. He'd look battle, murder and sudden death at the boys when they made up to her and the look he'd give Bob when she was nice to him would have killed a tarantula if it had hit him fair. In her heart she did *not* like Frisco; she was afraid of him, but she never showed it. If anything she was a bit nicer to him than she was to any other of the hands and he, being a skunk, misunderstood that and tried to take advantage of it.

One day when they was out in the hoss-corral where he was breaking in a better hoss for her—and he sure could do that same—he must have made some pretty hot love to her, something he ought not to have said, for she gave him a taste of an angry woman's tongue and started to leave, and he ups and tries to kiss her. She hit him across the face with her little quirt, put for the house and told Ma Stuart about it and she was one mad woman, pronto!

Ordinarily she would not hurt a fly but on what Nora told her about what Frisco had said to her, the old lady grabs the first thing she can lay her hands on, which happens to be a duck-gun full of B. B's, and puts out to the corral to introduce its contents to Frisco. I seen her go by all spitting-mad and with the shotgun in her hands, so not knowing what deviltry was up, I grabs my two guns and chasseys after her.

Just as we passed the calf-pen out comes the old man, sees me apparently chasing his wife with two pistols and *he* ambles into the house, snatches the first weapon he sees, which happens to be a sawed-off shotgun, and follows us. Arrived at the corral, behind Ma Stuart, I sees Frisco up the road on his pony going it ——for-leather. Ma sees the same thing but distance has no limitations for her so she lets off with both barrels in his general direction, I sent a dozen forty-four bullets after him just to show that I agreed with her and just then the air was split open by the old man's blunderbuss—following our example he had taken a pot-shot at the vanishing figure—

and then he asked in a peevish voice—

"What in the —— is this all about, anyway?"

His wife was too mad and flustered to answer him and puts back to the house and Nora. I didn't know a thing about it and had hard work convincing him of that fact, and the old fellow frothed at the mouth for a while; then *he* puts for the house. Some of the boys had heard the shots and come running up, and then there was more yapping.

Finally Ma told the old man, he told us and then the boys was all hot to get up a posse and find Frisco and hang him some to teach him better manners toward ladies. But it was still ditching and fencing time, the weather was good for it, the old man was urging it, the boys was all in debt to Lavinski and, anyway, a little posse, like our boys would make, to round up a man like Frisco in the hills was a job about equal to rounding up a tick in a bunch of wild cattle.

I was dead sure that that skunk had put for the hills, for there were several of the coulées from the hills that ran clear down into the flat land in the shape of gullies and draws, and once up one of these he could vanish from sight just like he had done, for not a soul had seen him after he left the ranch. I'm sure superstitious about one thing; I believe in hunches, and I had a hunch that Frisco would do his darnedest to get even with both Bob and Nora and he'd lay in the hills and watch his chance to do it.

I had a feeling that he was lying up there just watching the ranch and the folks in it and, when the weather was right, that he prowled down and around the place. You may laugh if you will but that feeling was so strong that I used to catch myself looking behind me when I was out of a night and stopping to hear if I could catch any wrong sounds—just like we used to do in Injun days.

For I had a stronger idea about him than the others did, and it got so at last that I had to convince myself about it. So, one day when all hands was out I got me a crow-bar, turned his wannigan-chest over and burglarized it from the bottom; you see he always kept it double padlocked and I'm no locksmith. I spent a busy and interesting quarter of an hour among the stuff in that chest and found that what I'd been suspecting was true—Mr. Frisco was wanted by the Government for meddling with Uncle Sam's mail pouches while in transit. It just goes to show how big a fool even the smartest rogue will be, in that chest was testimony enough to have put Frisco in Leavenworth for life, for there'd been killings along with the hold-ups, and there it was for any one to get at with a crow-bar or hatchet! He could have burned it all up any minute in the bunk-house stove, but no, he trusted in those two padlocks!

I fixed the chest back again so that it looked O. K., hunted up the old man and I says to him—

"If I ain't around the lot sometimes when you think I ought to be here, you just keep mum about it will you?"

You know me and the old man have known one another and worked together by spells for the last thirty years. And he answers—

"I *sabe.* Frisco, eh?' and I says:

"What you don't know don't hurt you or you'd have been dead years ago."

And he answered—

"You go clean to blazes!"

So that was settled and that night I "disappeared from mortal eyes" as Mustard used to say when he started on one of his long sprees.

YOU know my hoss Pinto, he's getting pretty well up in age right now, and he's out to grass on a full pension, but at that time he was in his prime, and me and him was worth any two other men when it came to scouting around the country. He sure was the wisest old guy of a hoss that ever stepped; tough, loyal, sure-footed and, say, that hoss could sure understand what I said to him! He had an eye like a hawk and could see pretty well in the dark, he was as sure-footed as a burro, and could hear a sound long before I could.

He'd step careful like a cat when I give him the word, would pull his stake or chew off his rope if he heard my whistle or call, I never had to hobble him no matter where I left him or how long I stayed. I'd just tell him to stay around there—and he'd stay there and fight like —— to stay there, too!

Lemme tell you, there ain't nothing like a hoss! I hear these dog-lovers yapping a whole lot about their poodles; some of the tales I read in some of these magazines about dogs makes me wonder why the fellows as wrote them don't build themselves a kennel right at once and live in it with their hounds! Me, if I'm going to love an animile I'm going to love one as is of some use and has cleanly habits and good sense!

Well, me and Pinto took to the hills for three or four days, as long as the grub and water lasted. We'd move about together at night and then I'd cache Pinto in some little cañon or deep gully during the day and do a lot of crawling around and spying out—but not a thing did I see and still that hunch of mine grew and grew.

You see, Frisco was about one-third Injun and the rest was Mex and mongrel, and I was counting on that one-third to make him wait his own good time to get even with Nora and the rest of us. So, I figured it out that the only way to get him was to make out like we'd forgotten him and weren't paying any attention to what we did or where we went, just like we'd always been doing before his muss-up—but to always go heeled and ready for him and give him no chance to get away safely with any of his meanness.

So, when I got back to the ranch I had a talk with the old man, and he had a talk with Ma Stuart, and she issues orders that Nora is never to go out of the ranch-house home-grounds unless some of us went with her. Being as it was Ma's orders, it went, and as most of us was pretty busy at that time it was Bob as was her escort nearly always.

Of course it happened! You take a nice-looking, clean-minded boy and set him out on long rides with a friendly, wholesome, good-looking girl and both of them free-hearted and it's bound to happen! When I could get the chance I'd notice that either the rides lengthened or the gait was mostly a walk after they got out of eyesight of the ranch-house. And soon they didn't come home to dinner, they'd take a lunch along and come back late in the afternoon. Even the boys noticed it and gave Bob a free hand and a full show, and I think that the old folks was much pleased over it, especially Ma. But I didn't forget about Frisco, and I says to Bob:

"Son, you want to keep away from the hills in these scientific rambles you and Nora are taking. There's plenty of flowers and plants and animiles down here on the mesa as there is in the hills and folks what's bent on scientific research—such as you and Nora—why, the matter of scenery ain't affecting them. You just keep in mind that there's likely to be a snake in them hills that's pizen to little children 'specially girls! Savvy?"

And Bob answers—

"I SAVVY, Charlie. I won't take any risks."

One day, about a month or so after Frisco had made his getaway, I had to take a lot of stuff over to the Depot and get a shipment of plunder back from there, so I took the buck-board instead of Pinto and what with one hindrance and another it was late—eight or nine at night, when I got to the ranch. I seen that the boys was all gathered round with their mounts ready and suspicioned as there was something up and sure enough here comes Ma Stuart, just as soon as I hove in sight, busting up to me and crying out:

"Oh, Charlie, Nora and Bob haven't got home yet and this man says that they started for Spouting Spring just about noon! I just know that wicked Frisco is at the bottom of it and won't you start right out and find them? The boys are all ready to go with you!"

I calmed her down with all sorts of promises and sends her into the house with the old man, and then I turns to the stranger, a cowman from over the Deep Creek district, and he tells me that he'd met Bob and Nora about noon, just at the edge of the hills, and they'd stopped to chat with him and ask him about the country over his way, and then they had spoke about the hills, and it appeared that this man knew them well.

Nora starts asking him about the scenery up there, and he gives her a glowing account of it and tells her about Spouting Spring and how pretty it was around there, and she got crazy to go and see it as it wasn't more than five or six miles from where they was. Bob tried to persuade her different but she wouldn't listen. Of course he couldn't tell her the real reason why they ought not to go into the hills, especially before the stranger, and so she got mad at him and said that she was going there by herself if he wouldn't go along—and a lot of talk like that, and when that didn't move Bob she puts the quirt to her mount and dashes off toward the hills, Bob after her, and that's the last the man saw of them.

I sure was mad and scared. Mad at Nora for doing a fool thing like that—but, shucks, you can't tell what a woman will do to a man when she's got him eating out of her hand. And I was scared at them not coming back by that time o' night, Spouting Spring wasn't over eighteen or twenty miles in a straight line although the trail in the hills was a mighty rough one. That hunch about Frisco was stronger than ever—I tried to think of other reasons as to why they didn't come but I couldn't do it. All there was in my head was Spouting Spring and Frisco. And, after a minute the two come together in my head and I says to the boys—

"Fetch me an ax."

They looked at me sort of wondering, but they brought the ax, and I put off to the bunk-house hot-foot, and the boys trailing after. It took me about two seconds to burglarize Frisco's box this time, and I soon had what I was looking for. This was a sheet of paper which I had seen before but hadn't paid much attention to at the time. It had a rough circle at one edge marked "S. S." and the same thing on the other edge marked "C", and between these two was a crazy wiggle in pencil.

It hit my mind while I was mixing up Frisco and the Spring in it that this paper which I'd seen might be a sort of map showing a trail from the Spring to a cave that everybody talked about an' no one hadn't ever seen.

The Spring was the only running water for miles around, the cave was said to have been a regular hold-out for outlaws, rustlers and hold-up men in the old days, and it seemed reasonable that there was some way of getting from the cave to the spring. But that section of the hills is pretty rough going, most of the scenery being on end and not very pretty. With that paper in my mind it sort of struck me that Mr. Frisco was hanging out there. He'd probably been there before and, if he'd got hold of Nora he'd probably get her to the cave, so it was up to me to find it before morning.

So I says to the boys,

"This here's a one-man job right at the start, and me and Pinto is that man. I start right now, and if so be as I'm not back here by sundown tomorrow night, you boys take your foot in your hand and make the Spring by day after tomorrow sun-up. Now, I don't want any yap about it, you hear my talk?"

They said they did, and the old man said that it went, so I gave Pinto a feed of oats, chucked some grub into myself, put some red-eye and some cakes of sweet chocolate into my saddle-bags, filled up my belt with ca'tridges for my guns and my .30-30, and soon me and Pinto was on our way.

It was a fine night for the work, dark as the inside of a cow, a little baffling breeze blowing from all directions and between Pinto's instinct and a little radium compass a fellow from New York gave me I reckoned to be at the Spring by midnight or a little after, and if that map was what I thought it was I aimed to be at the cave by dawn—and after that I hadn't made any program!

Luck stuck to me for awhile. I crossed the run that came from the Spring in fair good time. It was a little cañon full of grass, about a mile below the spring, and I left Pinto there with orders to stay there until —— froze over unless he heard me call or whistle, and he nodded his head. Then I lit a match or two in a safe place where the light couldn't be seen, and I studied Mr. Map until I got the wiggle and all its turns pretty well into my head, and then I took my rope and my .30-30 and headed up the run to the Spring.

From there I started into the wiggle, and that map was the right one but it sure was no easy trail and awful slow going in the dark. It dodged around rocks in unexpected ways and places, crept up dry arroyas full of boulders, climbed down stone-strewn gullies—I never could have followed it if I hadn't had that map in my head. As it was I lost my way several times and had to go back and pick up the trail.

Soon by the map I was getting pretty close to where the cave should be when a little round stone slipped under my foot and down I went, rifle and all making as much clatter as a company of cavalry. I fell flat at once and laid there the longest time waitting to see if any one had heard me, and while I lay there the dawn breeze commenced to blow, and the east lightened, and I knew that if I was going to hit the cave before sun-up I had to hustle.

And that's where I made a mistake. When this thought struck me up I jumped, my foot slipped again, and .30-30 and I went to the mat once more, and I hadn't much more than touched the ground when here comes a *plop-swish* and a rifle-crack, and a bullet struck the side of the rock beside me, and lead splashed all around me, and one little piece spun through my hair, my hat having fell off, and it nicked off a wisp of hair and scalp.

So I did the centipede act, flattened myself out and waited to see if that was just an accident or whether the shooter knew his business. Pretty soon there came another *plop-swish* a little higher up and soon after comes another still higher, for now you could see things a little as day was breaking.

I began to get the notion that the *hombre* as was practising on my rock sort of knew what he was doing. You see he wasn't able to see me or get a clear shot at any part of me so he trusted to putting me out of business by "splashing" me—firing at the side of the rock so that either the bullet would ricochet onto me or else it would spray into pieces when it hit the rock—and I tell you some of these pieces could tear a man's flesh pretty well if they hit it fair.

It's an old Injun hunter's trick, I learned it when we was fighting Injuns in the Bad Lands and I'd tried it on both man and beast, and also I'd learned to dodge it if it was dodgeable. So, I laid there quite a while getting flatter and flatter and closter to the ground with every shot, and I come to the conclusion that the *hombre* knew his business to the queen's taste. And just then when a few little pieces happened to tickle your Uncle Charlie's neck, it sure made him laugh, for it made him duck his head and right beside him under the rock was daylight, a place where the water had washed under the rock and made a little tunnel.

I took out a few loose stones and dirt until it looked to me, from my worm's-eye view of it, that I could scrouge through, and I backed into it mighty quick. boring my way with my feet, and in a minute, I was slipping down a little gulley on the far side of the rock from my friend Splasher. I didn't slide far, for I come up against a cliff, and I clumb the side of it most careful. It was no safe climb and I sure hated to try it, but it was either that or being lead-locked-up between those boulders or coming out in the open and making a rush for it—and I knew enough not to do that last.

Well, I climbed up that cliff mighty slow and careful, and finally come out on top between two slanting rocks and there before me was a nice prospect of landscape on edge, and so far as I could see, no way to go but down. I slanted round up there for quite a while before I could locate myself, but just as the sun rose I sighted the ranch way off in the distance, and that gave me a line and I soon located the Spring—not a quarter of a mile away and the wiggle was all of a mile long.

Then I crawled over the rocks and started to sight for the location of the cave, and just as I did so there comes in sight some hosses on a narrow trail a mile below me, three of them. On the first one was a man riding, and it was the figure of Frisco. On the next was a figure sitting up but all muffled in a poncho or blanket, and on the last one, across the saddle was tied the figure of a man, whether alive or dead I couldn't tell, but it looked like Bob.

THEY was too far off for me to try a shot at Frisco and, anyway, after that climb, I was in no shape to shoot straight or to take any chances with a rifle. So it was up to me to put on a payday hustle, get to Pinto, him and me get down the side of the hill and head off that bunch somewhere in the valleys south of the hills, for that was evidently where Frisco was putting for, and I knew that if he ever got a start it was a hundred to one shot that I ever caught him. And besides I did not like the way he had Bob loaded up. It looked to me as if he was taking him somewhere special to do something to him or put him somewhere. All this went through my mind in a second, and it was proved to me that the first thing to do was to get to Pinto.

Say, you've seen a lizard scutter down a rock-face when you come on him sudden? Well, the fastest lizard you ever saw was standing still to the way I got first to the Spring and then to Pinto. I don't remember much about it except that it was a jump and a slip and a fall and a slide and a tumble and then pick myself up and do it all over again, and once or twice I come to places where at other times I'd have shied at trying them or even thinking of it, and the first thing I'd know I was down them or across them—whether I'd jumped, fell or flown I couldn't tell—all I wanted was to get there.

I sure must have been some sight when I got to Pinto, for he threw back his ears and reared to strike me with his hoofs, and he sure was one outdone hoss when he heard my voice. I didn't stop to talk to him. I saddled him the quickest I ever did in my life, and it was him and me for the valley, and the side of that hill was no place for anything but a squirrel or a lizard. It wasn't quite as much of a nightmare as when I unclimbed that cliff but it was sure some interesting ride! Sometimes I was on foot and sometimes on hoss-back, sometimes Pinto was sliding forwards, sometimes backwards, sometimes sidewise, and twice we rolled over and I thought we was both goners.

But our luck held and we reached the level ground at last and, say, I was sick! Not a thing in sight, the little old valley stretching away for miles in front of me and not a movement anywhere! I sure could have sat right down and cried; all the heart seemed to go out of me, I knew that Frisco and his train must have reached the valley long ago, and yet he didn't have start enough of me to have got out of sight up the valley in that time. Honest, for one time in my life I knew what it was to feel plumb hopeless, and I was about to mount Pinto and scour off up the valley and see if I could find their trail when Pinto, the old far-seeing scoundrel, shoved his head over my shoulder and took one of his long gazes at a point two or three miles up the valley on the other side of it.

Then I took out my glasses and searched all up and down from the place where he had looked at and, sure enough, something was moving among the chapparal at one point, and it didn't look like cattle either. I watched it a long time, and here comes a hoss's head out of the brush, and the instant I see that, Pinto and me backs up out of sight behind a rock, and I got close down and watched. The hoss's head was followed by Frisco on him, then come that same figure muffled up on another hoss, and then come another hoss with nothing but saddle and bridle on! Where was Bob? What had that dirty —— done with him?

I was scratched and bruised for every inch of my skin, I was bloody from head to foot, sick, sore and dazed, my hand was trembling like I had the ague, but when I saw that empty saddle it acted on me like a big drink of strong liquor! I forgot my aches and pains, and bruises, my soreness and trembles left me—all I wanted was a fair chance at Frisco, and whatever he'd done to Bob I'd double-do on his body, with interest on account of Ma Stuart and Nora.

And I made up my mind that I was going to do all this with my two hands, I just wanted to feel his flesh in my fingers, to grip his throat and choke and bruise him to death— I just can't tell you how savage and brutal I felt towards the skunk. I sure saw red wherever I looked and Frisco was in the middle of it!

In a minute or two my mind cleared, and I knew that to fool such a fox as he was and get him close enough to jump him I'd have to have all my senses about me. I figured that he would not expect me anywhere around where I was. In the first place, he'd think that I was probably roosting up between those rocks waiting for dark or something else to give me a chance to get away, for, as I saw the place while I was shinning up that cliff, if I'd have moved either way from between those rocks I'd have been a fair mark for some one. And even if I had got out of there it was a long way to the trail he had come down on from the cave, and it led into the valley a long way beyond where we was. And, last of all, if he knew that section, as I thought he did, he'd know that no man or horse could ever come down that side of the hill—leastways not to be any good to themselves when they lit!

So I climbed a bit higher and out of sight and took a survey of the trail he was coming along towards me, and nearly opposite where we was it passed close to the hill and through a little bunch of scrub cactus and brush. I backed Pinto clean out of sight of any one passing and threatened to skin him if he moved a hair—and he bit at my ear when I said it—and then I did the centipede act again and squirmed through the brush until I got close up to the trail—and waited.

Soon the string come along and when Frisco was just opposite me I made a spring at him intending to pull him off'n his hoss, but one of the little tough thorn bushes laid hold of my jacket and held me back just a quarter of a second, but that was enough to give Frisco time to try to slip off the other side of his mount—and my gun was right out ready to catch him if he did. But in slipping off so quick—I reckon he was some startled at my appearance so unexpected—he got his foot tangled in his rope as it hung on the horn of his saddle, his hoss was scared at my jump and gave a bound to one side, that jerked the bridlereins of the hoss with Nora on it out of his hands, and the jump of his mount snapped the lead rope to the empty hoss. So, the first thing I saw was him sliding over the ground dragged by a rope around his leg; I caught just one sight of his face as he tried to straighten himself up at the start and if ever a man knew what was coming to him he knew it then.

I was so taken up by that look that the hoss and him was too far off for me to shoot, and, besides I wasn't wasting any time on him under the circumstances. I got hold of Nora's hoss, untied her from the saddle and took off the blanket; she was senseless and most dead, only the rope had kept her in the saddle. I couldn't get a word out of her, so I whistled to Pinto, got on him with her in front of me, led her mount and the empty hoss and went up the trail towards where I had seen them come out.

IT TOOK us some time to get there as I had to walk the hosses on account of her, and when I got to that place it took some time for me to locate Bob! And when I did and seen his fix I made up my mind that if there was any life in Frisco when I found him I'd drag him till I got tired and satisfied! There lay Bob on the sloping trunk of a fair-sized mesquite, facing the sun and head downward. His feet and legs was tied up among the limbs, his body lashed to the trunk of the tree and his arms spread out and lashed to the trunk at the elbows. On his hands and wound tight around them were strips of soft, wet rawhide, and around his head, across his forehead was the same things.

D'ye see the Injun deviltry of that mongrel hound? When the sun struck that rawhide and commenced to dry it, it would shrink, and you know the power of drying and shrinking rawhide! His hands and his head would be blood-full from his head-down position, the drying hide would crush his hands into pulp and would tighten on his head until his eyes popped out! I knew the utter devilish cruelty of it, for I've seen men that was so treated by the Injuns, and they weren't nice to look at—one look was enough!

Well, I untied him and cut the rawhide off'n him, and he fell into my arms, limp and helpless as a baby. I'd already carried Nora under the shade of some bushes, and I toted him over there and laid him beside her, and there we were, a pretty outdone lot of triplets. I mashed up some chocolate in some water in the cup off my canteen—luckily I had left it on Pinto and somehow it had survived our ground-and-lofty-tumbling-act—then I put in about three fingers of Joe's red-eye and dosed them both with it, and to keep themselves from being choked to death—for Joe's liquor was powerful or else the boys wouldn't have patronized him—to keep themselves from being choked to death they swallowed some of it, and after goggling at me a minute, Nora turns over to Bob, puts her head on his chest and in a minute both of them was asleep.

With that I took out my map, wrote on it that they were to lie quiet if they woke before I come back, and then I took Pinto and went back to look after Frisco and his hoss. I wanted to know his whereabouts if he was alive—I knew where they would be if he was dead! I trailed that hoss for most a quarter of a mile and found him fallen and all tied up and tangled in the rope, and at his heels was just a bundle of most awful looking clothes. The hoss had kicked out at what dragged behind its heels, run and fallen and kicked—I didn't touch anything, I didn't even take a second look, I just shot the hoss through the head and come away sick at my stomach. Even my intentions toward him hadn't meant anything like that!

When I got back to the pair of shook-ups they were conversing quite familiar, Bob's head resting on Nora's shoulder, their hands locked and their faces right up against one another. I backed off a bit and coughed out loud, but it didn't seem to feaze 'em one bit, so I just took it as a matter of course and asked 'em for an account of what had happened to them.

Just as I thought, Frisco had camped out in that cave almost ever since he made his getaway. South of the hills, along some of the valleys, were some settlements of nesters and a general store or two, so he could provision himself down there and no one would know where he came from.

He did a lot of boasting to them about how he had been close to the ranch several nights but was afraid to come too close. Also he had laid out on his lookout above the cave, and with his glass he had watched every one who came to or left the ranch, and he told them of a lot of times when they came fairly close to the hills.

That noontime he had been watching them and saw them meet the cowman and saw Nora run off from Bob and towards the hills, and he rode out to where he knew she'd come or pass, and sure enough they come right up to him and the first thing Bob knew he was roped, thrown and hog-tied. Nora tried to get away, but Frisco had her caught in no time, and he carried them both to the cave. That night he told them what he had in mind, something like this:

"Mr. Bob he will have a chance in the morning to shake hands with Mr. Rawhide, and he will find that it is not so easy to make him say 'enough' as it was with Mr. Frisco. And Miss Nora she has felt so bad about striking her lover across the face with her whip that she will love and kiss that face to make up for it. And when Mr. Frisco is tired of being loved he will sell her to a friend of his and he—Frisco—will come back to the ranch and kill that old devil of a she Stuart and cut the heart out of that —— of a Charlie"— and a whole lot more of stuff like that!

Nice bird, he was, and I began to be grateful to that hoss!

Well, Frisco kept them awake all night with just such talk, and all poor Bob could do was to squirm in his ropes, for Frisco had gagged him tight, and all that Nora could do was to blame herself for her foolishness and pray for help. And the one thing that made me feel proud while they was telling it was that both of 'em felt that your Uncle Charlie would manage somehow to save 'em. Frisco got out of the cave before dawn, came back with the rawhide, bound Bob's hands and head with it and tied him up tighter than ever.

Then he went out again and Nora heard the sounds of rifle shots and was sure that some of us from the ranch had come to save them. But soon Frisco came running in, tied Nora on her horse with a blanket over her head and body, tied Bob across his horse and started them off at once and the next thing she knew was my cutting her loose, for she did not know anything about Frisco fixing Bob in the mesquite.

They asked what had become of Frisco, and I lied to them and said he'd been thrown and killed when he tried to get away. I could have told Bob what really happened but I just couldn't tell Nora. Then they asked me about my doings, and I told them and then they just noticed my looks! You see, they'd been so took up with each other that they didn't notice that I didn't have my ordinary good looks with me, and Nora wanted to wash my face and bandage me up right away, but nothing doing!

"You 'tend to that little boy of yours," I says, "and promise to make him a more obedient wife—just lay a good stress on the 'obey' part of the marriage service when you come to it!" And that left them both with nothing to say!

They were too sore to try to move, and besides all that was needed at the Spring in the morning was one person to direct the Circle Y Vigilantes when they come. So I fixed the two turtle-doves up with blankets and so forth, gave them the rest of that Chocolate *à la* Redeye, and Pinto and me hunted the trail around and over the hill. It took some time, but we got to the Spring about sun-up, and the boys was there waiting on me and, if it hadn't been that Ma Stuart and the old man was along I'd have teased 'em a bit, but Ma got the tale out of me at once and shamed me before all the fellows—scratched and bruised as I was she puts her arms around me and kisses me a lot, and the old man sic-ing her on!

Then they wanted to get down to Bob and Nora right away—but shucks I'd seen Yet Hing, the Chinese cook messing over a fire and Bob and Nora could keep for awhile while I put some coffee and things into my empty hide—those two down there had one another and, in the state they was in, that was the two halves of the world—so what did they care about bacon and eggs?

In the telling I had to tell about Frisco's take-off and his messed-up condition, and nothing would do with Ma Stuart but he must be buried. The boys dug a hole and shoved him into it, but I reckon there were darned few prayers said.

Bob and Nora were married that Fall and he's boss of the ranch now, the old man and Ma spending their time and money rambling round "seeing America." But before all this happened, what do you think they did? Legally adopted me into the family same as if I was one of these foundlings out of an orphan asylum. Yes sir, I'm one of the family and got a share in the ranch—sort of makes me feel foolish at times, but if they can stand me as a relation I sure am proud to belong to 'em!"

MORE ABOUT "WILD BILL" HICKOK

by E. A. Brininstool

IN MOUNT MORIAH CEMETERY, in the little city of Deadwood, South Dakota, stands a monument dedicated to that renowned frontier character of early days, James Butler Hickok, otherwise and more popularly known as "Wild Bill." Mount Moriah cemetery stands upon a steep hillside which overlooks the town which was once such a paradise for bad-men, gun-fighters and desperate characters—the flotsam and jetsam of the frontiers.

Near the center of the cemetery, and surrounded by a high framework of wood, sustaining wire screen of small mesh, is a rude statue of red sandstone intended to represent Wild Bill. The wire screen is a protection against vandals who had begun to chip away the monument for "souvenirs."

The statue was chiseled out of a solid block from a neighboring quarry by a local artist. It shows a full-length figure in a short jacket and buckskin trousers, elaborately fringed, which was one of the costumes affected by Hickok. One peculiar feature of the statue is that the eyes are of white marble, while a six-shooter is clasped in the right hand.

The only epitaph is a footstone of white marble on which is inscribed—

Wild Bill (J. B. Hickok) Died July 2, 1876

Mount Moriah cemetery was not the original resting-place of the body of the famous scout and gunman. At the time of his murder, by one Jack McCall, Deadwood's cemetery was down in a gulch.

At the time the old cemetery was abandoned, it seems that an Eastern man named DeLancey, a "lunger," who was a great admirer of Wild Bill, caused an expensive shaft and monument to be erected over his grave, but that was chipped away by vandals so that its beauty was utterly destroyed, and after the body had been interred in the new cemetery the present monument and statue was erected.

Wild Bill never claimed to be an angel, but he had hosts of friends and admirers all through the West, and it is stated on the most reliable authority that he never wantonly killed a man, but that all his victims were killed in the performance of his duty as marshal and peace officer. He was utterly without fear, and never was known to do a mean or dishonest act, but had one of the kindest hearts and most generous of natures, combined with a most winning personality.

During the Indian campaign of 1868 through which Wild Bill served with distinction, he was "discovered" by Geo. W. Nichols, a member of Sheridan's staff, and made famous. Later, Robert Bonner, publisher of the New York *Ledger*, sent Col. Judson, whose pen-name was "Ned Buntline," out to Kansas to write up Buffalo Bill, who was just beginning to loom up on the horizon. Soon after this, Nichols wrote an article for *Harper's Magazine* eulogizing Wild Bill and adding his name to the roster of frontier celebrities.

Some say Hickok lacked business sagacity, but the probabilities are, from all that can be gathered, that Wild Bill did not care for "lionizing," and for that reason, after a very brief career behind the footlights, he became disgusted and went back to the frontier, while Cody continued on the stage and became the great national character which he always remained to the day of his death in 1917.

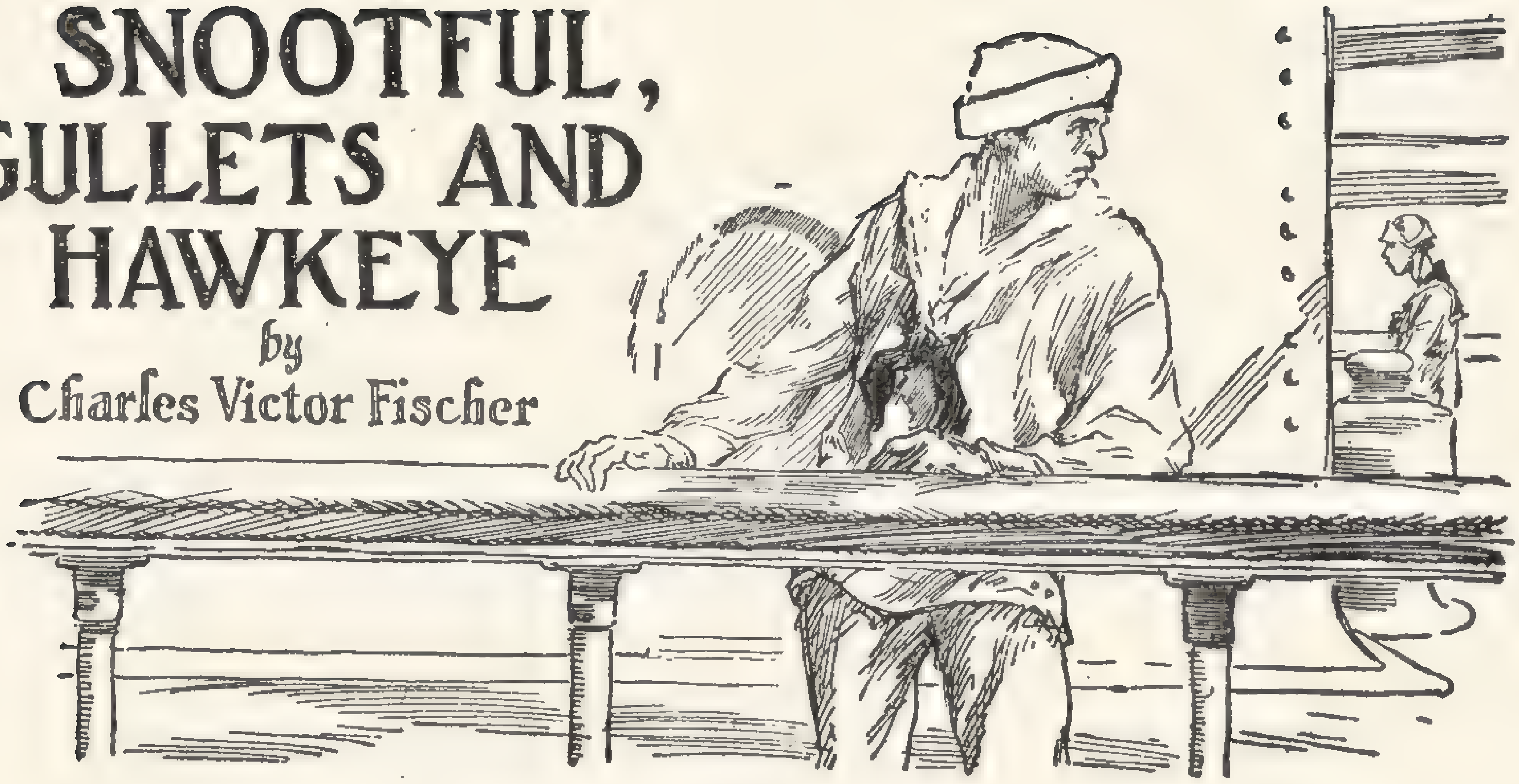
At the time of the shooting of Wild Bill in Deadwood, it appears that the best element of the town were out in response to an Indian alarm, and the gamblers and tough element, who were friends of McCall, the assassin of Hickok, called a jury of their own number, who heard McCall's "defense" and promptly acquitted him.

He was furnished with funds and a horse and jumped the country. He was later trailed to Laramie where his arrest was caused, and he was taken to Yankton, tried for murder and hanged on the day that R. B. Hayes was inaugurated President. McCall alleged, at his trial, that Wild Bill had murdered his brother in Abilene, Kansas, but witnesses were produced who proved that McCall never had a brother, and his bluff was promptly called and his execution followed.

SNOOTFUL, GULLETS AND HAWKEYE

by

Charles Victor Fischer



Author of "Mad Wells," "Cold Turkey," etc.

IT WASN'T good sense that got me into being shipmates with "Snootful" Bennet. It's a fact that no man with good sense would've thought of tying bags with him. In the Navy a man with good sense tries to keep his slate clean; and no man could do that if he hooked up with Snootful Bennet.

There were shipmates galore to pick from. Nine hundred tars made up the family of that battle-wagon; and any one of about eight hundred and ninety of them would give you his shirt.

As for cheerful-giving qualities, Snoots was no slouch himself. In fact he's included in that eight hundred and ninety.

And yet, in the matter of picking shipmates, Snootful was looked upon as tabu. Fine lad, good-hearted, regular guy, and all that—but red ink on a fellow's record didn't get him anything. Monkey see, monkey do. To hook up with Snootful meant red ink.

Snoots worried less over a court martial than the ordinary gob did over a couple of hours extra duty. He was trotted up before the captain on an average of six times a week. He always had a court martial coming up. The brig was his home. But that fellow actually grew fat on trouble.

He wasn't built along worrying lines. He had too much of shoulder power, and not enough forehead to worry. He was all shoulders. Short, heavy set—a hundred and seventy pounds of muscle, mostly, packed into five feet and four inches of ox-like frame. But not entirely unintelligent was he. Indeed no. On that freckled, unbeautiful face was a perpetual grin, so full of tricks and schemes was the red-haired head of him.

He could no more worry than a stone can float. If a court martial fined him a couple or three months pay, why, Snoots just sat down and reasoned it out that he'd never had that money anyway; following which he'd borrow a few dollars, start a crap game, clean it up, then go ashore—jump ship if necessary—and celebrate his court martial. If they put him in the brig he was happier than ever, for while he was locked up he was dodging work. And if, for some petty offense or other, the captain slipped a couple or three hundred hours extra duty, Snoots would frame things up somehow with the chief master-at-arms—he'd never work it off.

He'd rob the cook, or the baker, just for the fun he got out of slipping something over. To get out of coaling ship he'd stow himself away so thoroughly that a ferret couldn't find him, and, toward the finish of coaling, suddenly show up, as black and dirty as any man aboard, as if he'd been on the job from start to finish.

As a rum-houser he was without a peer. He always managed to get booze somehow. If he couldn't get ashore owing to the ship being at sea, he'd go snooping through the boats and drain all the compasses of alcohol;

or perhaps he'd steal the cook's lemon extract, or the barber's bay rum. I remember him drinking hair tonic more than once. Even when he was locked in the brig, serving a bread-and-water sentence, he somehow contrived to keep from getting sober.

If they didn't stow him in the brig when he returned from liberty at night, no one aboard would get a wink of sleep. He'd go staggering about decks all night, waking us up with a little flashlight he carried, telling us he had, "a awfa shnootful."

No, sir. No man with good sense would've been shipmates with Snootful Bennet. You couldn't have paid me to hook up with him. It meant trouble—and I wanted to walk straight. The way things turned out, however, I couldn't do anything else.

If I'd had an Adam's apple—Ah! There's the little hicky! If I'd had an Adam's apple——

But that's telling the story backwards.

We had a gullet slitter on that ship. Yes, sir, a real live slicer of windpipes—just that. A sort of second Jack the Ripper—only different. He was a big loose-boned Hoosier with long dangling arms and talon-like hands. He had the strength of six strong men—and I *know*. His long bony features looked harmless enough, until you caught a certain wild glint in his beady, black eyes and heard him snarl through his teeth. Although he looked at least forty years old, Gullets was but a "raw boot"—recruit. He shipped as a coal-passer.

I knew that fellow was queer before he'd been on the ship a week. Trouble was, no one would believe me. I was the only man in the ship's company who took him seriously. They probably figured if he *was* a lunatic he'd be crafty enough at least to try to hide it, not go around the ship advertising it.

Gullets could render a man helpless as quick as you can say "Snip!" Slipping up from behind, with his right talon he would grab a man's right wrist and jerk it up to the small of his back; in the same instant his left talon would shoot beneath the victim's locked arm, up over his right shoulder, and wrap itself about his chin. Back snapped the victim's head, held so by that big talon under his chin. He was locked, pinned hard and fast, so that he could neither move nor let out a sound. And all this, remember, he accomplished in less time than it takes to say, "Snip!"

There you were, helpless. If you tried to squirm he'd put on a little pressure beneath your locked arm. An attempt to squawk and that talon closed tighter about your mouth and jaw, pulled your head back a little more.

Thus holding his victim with one long arm and talon, with his other talon Gullets would now begin feeling up and down over said victim's windpipe.

"You have a nice smooth neck," in that deep bass voice of his he'd gurgle in your ear. "You have no Adam's apple. Ah, would I had a butcher-knife. Such a nice, smooth, plump neck." That's the way he talked.

The first few times he pulled that stunt on me I merely grinned him up and down, thinking, of course, that he had lots of crust for a "raw boot." But when, on about his third day aboard, he nailed me fast for about the twentieth time, I turned on him.

"Say, guy," I said, "when you keep pulling the same joke over and over you take all the giggle out of it! Ain't it about time you started to pick on somebody else?"

He stood there looking down at me in silence. He stood a little over six feet. Just then there was something in those black beady eyes that made me think of snakes. Not a word out of him. The laughs of a few forecastle idlers near by was all I heard.

"I like a joke," I went on. "But also I like variety."

Still he remained silent, his black snaky eyes roving up and down over me. Finally he turned and leaned his long back over the rail. I did the same. The water churned and pounded against the ship's side below us, and from the bridge overhead came the voices of the signal gang. Several times I caught him eyeing me aslant, and he made me feel uneasy. Finally I spoke again.

"Practise your Jap tricks on somebody else," I said. "There's nine hundred men on the ship."

He straightened up as if he'd been jolted with electricity.

"They all have Adam's apples!" he snapped, shooting a quick, vicious glare at me.

After which he again leaned his longness over the rail.

Right then I realized something. He *meant* it. He was not acting. They could scoff all they pleased, that fellow was an escaped lunatic and I knew it. First thing I thought was, "Humor him." Perhaps if I could get him to talk I might get a line on what his mental works was doing. I pointed at a couple of tender-yeared tars, two raw recruits, at that moment walking passed us on their way aft.

"Adam's apples!" I said. "Where do you get that racket? Why, man, we only just got a draft of two hundred boots from the training station; and I don't believe you'd find ten Adam's apples in the gang."

"But they're all thin, undeveloped necks," he came right back, and he was as serious as a judge pronouncing death sentence. "Your neck is plump, smooth, well-rounded, withal lacking the Adam's apple. You don't know what a beautiful neck you have. If you could once see it when it arches—so plump, smooth——"

His voice died out.

"Yeah?" I was thinking. If this fellow was a lunatic, a battleship was no place for him. I was pretty sure he was one, all right, but I couldn't see my way clear to nailing him down. You see, he talked in that wild way only when he was monkeying around me, and then barely loud enough for my own ears. Oh, he'd grab me and pin me fast right out in the open, on the forecastle, or the topside; but all that butcher-knife and Adam's-apple stuff he'd hiss into my ear, not loud enough for any one else to hear. When he talked to any one else he was perfectly rational.

"Look here, guy," I finally blurted out, "just what kind of a game are you trying to put over?"

Instead of replying he drew himself up to the full of his six feet and something, slanting me down along his long nose, as if he was grossly insulted. Then he strode sedately across the deck and sat down upon a chest against the turret. I followed and took a seat beside him.

"I want to know just why you pick on me, guy," I demanded. "And never mind about the Adam's apple, and the smooth neck either. You've got some other reason at the back of your head."

I wanted to get him talking. I was curious to know just what sort of things were crawling around inside his skull.

"Reason!" he mocked. "Reason! You're a liar! Your words belie your looks. With your eyes you tell me I'm insane, while with your mouth you flatter me with being capable of reason." He pushed that wild-man's face over close to mine. "You think I'm insane. Am I right?"

"As long as you put it out flat-footedly, yes," I said. "Not exactly insane, but somewhat loose."

"You're right," he snapped. "But who'll believe you?"

He had me stumped. He acted like a lunatic, admitted he was one.

"But how is it you act sensible to everybody else but me?" I asked him.

He sat chuckling over that for a minute or so. Then instead of answering he put me a question—

"Do you believe in the reincarnation of souls?"

"Do I believe—. Say, what's that got to do with Adam's apples and butcher-knives?"

He sat up, stiff and straight, his whole expression changing. That snaky look was again in his eyes and his crooked teeth showed like those of a snarling wolf.

"Just this—" he hesitated—"that therein lies the reason you ask me for."

"Clear as mud," I said. "The reincarnation of souls—Adam's apples—butcher-knives——"

I pondered hard over that combination a few moments.

"Yes," I said finally, "I know what all those things mean, all right. But how do they all link together?"

Then he came at me. Such a cyclone of fury as he ripped out to me, that afternoon on the chest, I never want to listen to again. Yet it was interesting.

It seems that thousands of years ago, way back in a previous life, I pulled a dirty trick on Gullets. I had beaten him to it, I gathered from his ramblings, in the matter of a lady of great beauty and royal blood. Then later, when he tried to make a getaway with my lady fair, I had him seized and thrown into prison, where he languished long in wretchedness. It's too long a tale to tell. The wind-up was: he was marched up before a great crowd of people to have his head chopped off. And by the time he reached that point in the story, his face was no longer that of a human.

"You laughed!" he snarled. "You cheered, as I was being marched out before the vast multitude! You clapped and shouted as the heavy knife descended upon the throat of me! You——"

"Hold on a minute," I broke in. "Where was all this?"

"You tittered and giggled and added voice to the colossal whisperings of the horde that grinned up at the glazed eyes and lolling tongue of the severed head of me!"

All in a breath he got that off.

"You're full of prunes," I broke in again. "I don't remember anything about all that."

Looking at him now, he was an arch-fiend. His face was livid, his eyes blazing, with hatred. About the corners of his mouth the saliva was being worked into foam.

"There were thousands besides you," he was off again. "Yea, many thousands. But I remember you all, and you'll all pay—every last one of you. Many of you have already paid. Hundreds of lives I've lived and hundreds of gullets I've slit. Down, down, down through the ages I've lived and died and lived and died—a gullet a life."

He stood up.

"Better wipe your mouth off," I said.

Scowling down upon me in a way that made ice shoot up and down my spine, he resumed:

"Know this, you who laughed when the knife descended upon the gullet of me: Not till I've made the last cross-wise incision, strictly speaking, severed the last wind-pipe of the whole gibbering, chattering horde of you, will the mission of my reincarnating soul have been accomplished. Down, down, down through the ages—a gullet a life. Yes, one gullet each life."

He turned and walked outboard. I remained on the chest, watching him. What stumped me was the abrupt change that came over him when, a moment later, he joined a couple of fellows at the rail. Standing there chatting, smiling, nodding, he looked anything but a madman. He was a puzzler.

I SAT there a long time, turning things over. One gullet each life, eh? I wondered if he had slit any wind-pipes during this life. He hadn't stated. He had slit hundreds of gullets, but in former lives, I took that to mean. Anyhow, I finally concluded, the ship wasn't big enough for the both of us. So I went up on the bridge and got the officer of the deck's permission to speak to the executive officer. The executive we had then was one of the finest officers in the Navy. He gave every man a hearing.

I found him back on the quarter-deck. We had a madman aboard, I reported, and went on to tell him of the many times Gullets had grabbed me and pinned me fast during his few days aboard, finishing with the incident of only a half-hour before.

My story failed to convince him. He heard me through, nodding sympathetically, but smiling in an amused way that plainly showed me he thought I was making a lot of noise over nothing. He did, however, give me the satisfaction of summoning Gullets aft.

But I had no chance against Gullets. Why, that fellow had more high-flown words than Shakespeare. He talked the exec. blue in the face.

"Why merely a little fun, sir—nothing more, I assure you, sir. I sought only to make friends. I deeply regret, I assure you, sir, that my advances were obtrusive. I was favorably impressed by this man, rather liked his, ah, well, general get-up—" he looked at my neck—"and being new on the ship, sir, also having a penchant for sociability——"

And so on, in that deep bass voice of his, he gurgled. He ridiculed me down to the size of a flea. When we left the executive, if he had either of us down for a madman, it was me. He did, however, order Gullets to leave me alone in the future.

Walking forward I said to Gullets:

"All right, you big yap; you got away with it that time. But just let me make you a little promise. The next time you come monkeying around me, I'll open your head up with a belaying-pin!"

He didn't reply, but in those black, restless eyes again glittered that something that made me think of snakes.

IT HAPPENED one dark early morning, about three months later, in the navy-yard at Boston where we were moored to the wharf.

I was a quartermaster third-class in the signal force, the bridge-gang. We numbered twenty-one—sixteen seamen, four quartermasters third-class, and one chief quartermaster.

At sea, five of us were always on duty—a full watch of four seamen and a quartermaster. But in the navy-yard, there being no exchange of signals, hence nothing for us to do but strike the bells every half-hour, a one-man watch was all that was necessary.

That morning I had the duty from twelve to four, the mid-watch. I sat propped up against a pile of flags out on the starboard flag-board, a bowl of very thick coffee in one hand, a cigaret in the other. It was near one o'clock, dark, starless, and the yard was as quiet and lonely and somber as a cemetery.

Suddenly, from up the yard a ways, came a voice, and with it the heavy *clump clump clump* of foot-falls. A couple of gobs returning from liberty, I supposed. But not so. A moment later I saw that but one dark form moved down the wharf. A tar returning from liberty after midnight, talking to himself—I'd have bet my shirt it was Snootful Bennet. And won. As he came rolling down the wharf, abreast of the bridge, I heard:

"Yesh'r, got a wafa shnootful. Awfa, awfa shnootful!"

I sat there watching him make the quarter-deck gangway—or rather, try to make it. Of course it was too dark to see much in detail, but I could make him out, going round and round down there on the wharf, each time he finished a circle making a lunge for the gangway, missing it, going round again, and again, and yet again. Finally a dark form moved out over the gangway—the anchor watch. And Snoots was steered aboard.

Here at least was one advantage in having the mid-watch tonight. I wouldn't be waked up by that pest flashing his light in my eyes. I hoped he wouldn't get it into his head to come up on the bridge. It's no fun for a sober man to have a rum-houser come gushing and slobbering over him. But it's a fact that Snoots was funny at times.

Still wondering would the officer of the deck stow him in the brig, I finished my smoke, also the coffee, then slid down off the flag-board. It was near time to strike two bells. Our clock was in the chart-board, over on the port wing.

Crossing the bridge center, the portion within the mast, I thought I heard a step. I turned, and was momentarily startled by a tall dark form that loomed up within arm's reach of me. It was "Hawkeye," our chief, I supposed, snooping around to see if the man on watch was awake. Then it flashed to me that this form was a little taller and considerably broader than that of Hawkeye.

The next moment all speculation ceased, as a big bony talon clutched my right wrist and yanked it around behind me and up to my shoulder-blades. He never gave me a chance. With that lightning quickness he locked my right arm up high behind me, then shot his left beneath it and up over my right shoulder. Back went my head, stars leaping and dancing, so abrupt was the shock of it. One of his long legs crossed diagonally behind me above the knees. Then he had me, hard and fast.

I squirmed, tried to kick up backwards with my bare feet, but the effort only brought a greater pressure and consequent pain in that locked arm. I attempted to get out a shout, but one feeble, "Urk" was the best I could do, so quickly and tightly did that big talon close about my mouth and jaw.

There I was, as helpless as a rat in a trap. I couldn't move, shout, nor yet make a noise by stamping on the deck for I was barefooted.

Once more that big talon was feeling up and down over my wind-pipe, and that voice, like a blend of a dog's snarl and a snake's hiss, gurgling in my ear,

"A nice, smooth, plump neck. Well-rounded, developed, withal no Adam's apple."

And this time, I noted, he didn't add—"Would I had a butcher-knife."

Maintaining his paralyzing hold, he worked me forward to the steering-wheel. And there he seemed to reach out for something. I think he had that butcher-knife on the helm-angle indicator. At any rate, when those murderous fingers again moved up and down over my neck, I could feel that they clutched something hard, and I knew it was the handle of a knife.

"Who laughs now? Now! Now! You atom, who laughs?" And his chuckle sounded like the *cluck-cluck* of a mother hen.

He drew the blade across my neck from ear to ear—the back of the blade. It felt like a streak of ice.

"A gullet a life. A thousand lives, a thousand gullets. A smooth, plump neck—a keen-edged knife——" and again his voice trailed off in a string of hen-like chuckles.

I tried to work him. Letting my whole

body relax, I hung for a moment on that powerful arm, as if unconscious. But that failed because it only served to add the power of my own weight to the leverage he applied beneath my locked arm. I've thought since that I might have got loose by throwing a backward somersault.

"A cross-wise incision right there."

He jabbed a finger into my throat. I went, "*Glk.*" He chuckled again, and added—

"At the esophagus."

I felt the blade press against my neck below the left ear—the back of the blade.

"Beginning here," he said, drawing it slowly across, "and ending here." That is, from ear to ear.

Scared, frightened, terrorized—none of those words express my feelings at that moment. Now! Who was right? They wouldn't believe me! Just imagine! Crossing the Big Divide at the tender age of twenty-two! Why, I'd never even been given a chance to cut my wisdom-teeth! Death. Cold, black death. I saw the faces of my mother, father, sisters, brothers, aunts, uncles, cousins.

"Now, pray, —— you, pray!" he hissed. "In thirty seconds I shall have rendered your wind-pipe in twain. Pray, you rat. But pray and be ——, for nothing can save you! I'm going to send you into your next life!"

Again I felt that blade against my neck below the left ear—not the back, but the keen edge of it. More than that! I felt the piercing sting of it as it bit in.

To this day I carry that scar beneath my collar—a reddish, thread-like mark, two inches long.

How did I? I didn't. It was Snootful who turned the trick. All I can tell you is, that instead of the onrush of black, there came an onrush of white. There was a sudden flood of light—white, blinding light. It lasted barely a second. Close on top of it came a heavy thud, as some one's jaw stopped a flying fist. That was all. Next I knew, I'd been released and was lying sprawled on deck.

Snootful said, later, that what had happened in the few hours before that moment didn't register. He remembered he'd been in Higgins' café, over in the city, up to about nine o'clock. That was all. He couldn't remember returning aboard. Nor could he imagine why he had come up on the bridge. All he remembered was that he had suddenly returned to a state of knowing, flashlight in hand, just in time to see one man in the act of cutting another's head off with a butcher-knife. Whereupon he had let fly a fist.

"If I'd a been sober I'd a no-doubtly knocked 'im out," he said over and over, down in the sick bay, where a pharmacist's mate busied himself swabbing out my cut.

Blood continued to gush from that cut for about a half-hour. My jumper and undershirt were soaked. But they finally got me cleaned up and straightened out ship-shape again. Then, about two o'clock, I started aft to tell the story to the officer of the deck.

Walking aft along the gun-deck I heard not a single snore. The ship seemed deserted. I learned the whyfore of this when, back on the quarter-deck, I made my report to the officer of the deck.

"We've got every available man out in the yard searching for him," he said. "A man on the forecastle saw him gallop over the forward gangway, cross the wharf, and run up the gangway of the *Constitution.*[*] We've searched her from bowsprit to rudder; all we found was rats."

How Gullets got out of the navy-yard can only be guessed at. No boat was reported missing. He didn't get past the marines at the gate. There seemed only one explanation: After crossing the deck of the *Constitution*, he had dived and swum for it.

It came to us some time later that he actually was an escaped lunatic. His description tallied minutely with that of one who had made a getaway from an asylum in the West, months before. But the months rolled by and our commanding officer received no word of his apprehension. He was just gone.

* * *

WELL, sir, before noon of that same day I was glad it had happened. The Gullets question was settled. He was gone—at large, true; but off the ship. For the first time in months I felt easy. Nor was that all, as I learned at nine o'clock that morning, when the executive officer summoned me aft to his office.

No; he didn't apologize for having turned me the indifferent ear that day—the day

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[*] The old *Constitution*, the frigate of our early historic days, was moored to the opposite side of the wharf, right across from us.

I'd trotted Gullets up to him. Officers don't apologize to enlisted men. Instead, he gave me a mighty big smile, asked me a few questions, and told me to sit down. Next thing I knew, his yeoman, Tommy Delvin, was pushing something in front of me to sign. And, as quick as you can say, "Snip!" I was a quartermaster second-class. He boosted me a rung without any examination.

He didn't say much; only smiled, and looked at me with those fine dark eyes of his in a way that made me think he was the finest man in the world. He was a fine big man at that; tall, straight and broad, strong-featured and bronzed — clean-cut anyway you looked at him. He couldn't have been under forty—with those three gold bars on his shoulders—but he didn't look it by a good ten years, so clean and well-ordered had been his way of living.

No, sir; he didn't use the word "sorry" once in the ten minutes I was closeted with him. He never played that system. Compensation, not lamentation, was the big idea with old boy Exec. A mistake made meant something to be done. He was a doer, not a sayer.

"I thank you very much for the boost, sir," I blubbered. "I sure didn't expect to make 'second-class' in less than another year, sir."

He smiled.

"Why, you ought to make chief in that time," he said. "There's no reason why you shouldn't go right on up. All it takes is patience. Steady application—that's the stuff."

He was a prince.

After thanking him about nine times, I finally left him. On my way out I met Snootful coming in. Curious, I waited for him outside. In about five minutes he came out, grinning— Great Guts! How that Snoots could grin!

"Wha'd'yuh think, Breeze?" he gibbered. "The old boy had it in his head that I *kicked* Gullets las' night. Yeah! First thing he says to me is—

" 'Great feet o' yours las' night, Bennet.' "

"Feet? Oh——" I laughed. "Great feat, eh?"

"Yeah! I tol' 'im I never use my feet when I'm fightin'! An' then he laughs, like at somethin' real funny, an' goes on to tell me that he's puttin' in fer a life-savin' medal fer me. He says he wishes he could rate me up to coxswain, or gunner's mate, but can't account of all the wet spots on my record."

Snoots had then been in the Navy six years, and was still a seaman.

We walked forward to the forecastle and sat down on two bitts.

"Snoots," I said after a while, "is there anything I can do to make you feel good?"

He sat there staring vacantly up into the shrouds and rigging of the *Constitution* across the wharf.

"How about it," I tried again. "Boy, you saved my neck with that wallop! I'd like to——"

"If I'd been sober," he broke in, "nodoubtly I'd a knocked 'im out."

That was a hard one for Snoots to get over—that failure of his wallop to stretch a man out.

"Sure," I said. "But the point is, I'd like to square things."

"Aw—" he turned his head away—"you don't owe me nothin', Breeze. Anyway, I could never make good up there on the bridge."

I studied him a moment, then leaned over and grasped one of his big hard arms.

"Do you mean that you'd like to get up on the bridge?"

"Well—" he fidgeted—"I can't say I'm pertickaler *against* gettin' up there. I'd ruther be on the bridge than on deck an' it's a fact, pertickaler with all the boatswain's mates down on me an' allus ridin' me. But o' course I ain't got much brains or anything."

"Oh, you got as much brains as any one else," I replied. "Tell you what, Snoots: I'll see Hawkeye. I'll get you up there."

He was grinning again.

"But I don't know nothin' about signals."

"Oh, we'll pull you through on that," I assured him. "Only thing is, you'd have to ease up on the rum. You know what Hawkeye is. If he once got a whiff of anything on your breath while on duty, it'd be all off. Back down on deck you'd go."

"That part of it'd be all right," he said, in a tone that was businesslike.

And I left him, to hunt up Hawkeye, the signal chief. I found him on the bridge.

This Hawkeye was built along the lines of a lighthouse. Almost six feet tall, yet he weighed under a hundred and forty, so slim was he. He had the face of a fox, with small green eyes that saw much, a mouth that seldom opened to smile, and a long, straight, sharp-pointed nose that was keen on the sniff. He could wiggle that nose, in the same way as a jackass can his ears.

"Absolutely *no!*" Hawkeye cut me off. "Not that bird. If I didn't have a man left in the gang, I wouldn't take him. He's less use and more trouble on this ship than a rat. You got better sense than put any such proposition up to me."

I tried hard to drum it home on Hawkeye that Snootful had saved my neck, but he only sneered and wiggled his long straight nose.

"He's useless and troublesome," he said over and over. "As for that saving-your-neck affair, I can't see where he pulled anything great. Nothing to that but luck. He was soused. Came up here and stumbled into things, that's all. Anyhow, I can't see him for the signal gang. You can't get him on the bridge by talking to me."

In the full minute that passed before I replied, my temperature went up, up, and up. Heat and reason will not mix. You can't study logic in a hot room.

"I can't, eh?" said I.

"Not by talking to me," he repeated.

"Then I'll talk to some one else!"

For a moment he wiggled his nose at me.

"Go ahead," he said invitingly. And, as I spun on my heel to start aft, he added: "Only this, Breeze: Don't do anything you might be sorry for!"

"You can't bluff me," I flung back. "If you were a shipmate, you'd help a shipmate do a shipmate a favor. Snoots Bennet saved my neck. I promised to land him on the bridge, and on the bridge he lands. To —— with you!"

Aft to the executive officer I went. That wasn't just the proper thing to do. I should have gone to the signal officer first. But I was warm.

And I made it. Oh, I had a powerful pull with old boy Exec. It was irregular. Seldom has a third-class petty officer any chance against a chief petty officer. But Snootful Bennet received orders to report to Hawkeye that same day.

That afternoon Snoots came up on the bridge, where Hawkeye had us all assembled for a general bawling out. That was one of Hawkeye's hobbies—delivering bawling outs.

Snoots didn't wait for Hawkeye's—

"What do *you* want up here?"

"I'm in this gang," he broadcasted. Then to Hawkeye— "Exec's orders to report to you."

Hawkeye looked like a bleached ghost. For a few moments his small rat's eyes darted back and forth from Snoots to me. The point of his nose quivered. Then abruptly he turned scarlet.

"All right," he snapped. "Stand watches with Breeze."

That terminated the bawling out. Hawkeye shot me a glare that I felt down to my toes, then went stumbling down the bridge ladder. No sooner had he disappeared around the chart house below, than Snootful commenced firing.

"Well fellers," he said, "there's on'y one way to start things off right." He bent over, and out of each sock drew a full pint bottle. "Let's go," he finished, handing one to me and the other to "Scotty" Howie.

Then to show he was a man of action Snoots clicked a pair of dice in one hand, while in the other he flourished a ten-dollar bill.

"Shoot any part of it," he invited.

Some one fetched a blanket. Down we went on our knees. A half-hour later Snoots had every dollar on the bridge.

THERE we'll have to scud lightly over a year or so.

Never did a tar sit softer than did Breeze during that year. He had a drag, and his path was smooth.

Strictly speaking, as Gullets used to say, I had two drags. Besides having a tremendous pull with the executive officer, I stood high with the chaplain. This was by reason of my ability to play the organ. Every Sunday morning, when "Chap" held divine service, that was my job.

Between you and me, more than once they had to hunt me up for that job. And more than twice they found me "kneeling in" at the edge of a blanket, in some remote part of the ship.

It's anything but an agreeable feeling, that—the huge claw of a huge chief master-at-arms clutching at your jumper collar, when you're kneeling in and feel lucky. And that "Nobby" Walker, our chief cop, had much of man-handling lore. Imagine the son-of-a-sea-hound, with a handful of your jumper collar, walking you the full length of the ship. Yes, sir; that's the way Nobby used to walk me to church. Nor would he let go of my collar till he'd landed me on the organ stool.

I was in fine shape to sit there, with a couple of hundred tars and officers at my back, and play hymns, after that.

So that my drag with the chaplain brought me more gloom than joy. It's a fact that one Sunday morning Nobby yanked me away from about two hundred dollars. And I never recovered it. But of course that's a small thing on a big ship.

But the drag I had with old boy Exec—that brought me things worth while. He boosted me to quartermaster first-class, six months after I'd been made second. I was soaring. He granted me shore liberty in places where it almost took an act of Congress to get a man off the ship. I never had to wait for pay day; a special-money requisition was mine for the asking.

In many ways he helped me. If he came up on the bridge and saw me idle, out came the sextant and round and round went the pair of us with navigation. He taught me to shoot the sun and work out a sight. He was a regular daddy o' mine.

Hawkeye, still sour on me for going over his head to land Snoots on the bridge, tried several times to trot me up before the captain on different charges. But not once could he make it stick; his reports never got beyond old boy Exec.

Then I had other drags. I was always good for a squabble of ham and eggs, a slab of beefsteak, or a turkey drumstick from the ship's cook; or a pie from the baker. I stood aces up with the marine who had charge of the officers' laundry, hence never had to scrub my own clothes. It was pickin's for Breeze on that ship.

And yet Breeze was the most worried tar aboard.

No, it wasn't Hawkeye. He didn't figure at all in my scheme of things. As long as old boy Exec was on the ship, Hawkeye was as harmless as a toothless wolf, as far as I was concerned. Snootful and I had him reduced to a simple problem in arithmetic. He, Hawkeye, had less than a year to serve. When he got paid off, I would move up to chief, thus creating a vacancy for Snootful, who would automatically become boss of my watch. So much for Hawkeye.

The thorn in my wide was Gullets. Somehow I couldn't shake clear of the thought that he was still at large. Ashore on liberty I kept an eye peeled over each shoulder. Snootful used to say—

"Yuh put me in mind of a guy the cops are lookin' fer"

I used to dream! Man—what dreams! I'd lie there in my hammock, shivering, teeth rattling, yet sweat oozing from every pore. Black, snaky eyes—I'd see them by the thousands, snapping and leering at me, while a hand, big, bony and talon-like, that gripped the handle of a butcher-knife, moved up and down over my windpipe. And above the rattling of my teeth I'd head that hissing, snarling, chuckling voice:

"A crosswise incision right there. At the esophagus. I'm going to send you into your next life!"

The miracle is that I didn't break my neck; for more than one of those dreams wound up with me falling on deck.

ALL THOSE chair-warmers in the Navy Department have to do is press buttons. To those people a naval officer is nothing more than a number. An enlisted man ranks with, but after, a grain of dust in their scheme of things.

Of course it never occurred to those powerful persons down there that in transferring our executive officer to another ship they were leaving me high and dry.

It came with the suddenness of a thunderclap Old boy Exec was leaving. Leaving! He was gone! Before we could blink an eye.

And then—oh, then!

I feel like saying, "May the black soul of Hawkeye sizzle and roast in the white heat of eternal fire!" But no, sir; I'll try to be a good sport. May the gods give him an even break.

What do you think of a bird so rotten at the core that he'll nurse a grudge against a man throughout a whole year, for the mere act of going over his head to do a shipmate a favor?

Such a human rat was Hawkeye. No sooner had the Exec left the ship than that big far-down came at me. He commenced firing on the afternoon of that same day.

The executive officer left the ship in the forenoon. We were lying in Hampton Roads, Virginia. At noon we pulled in the hook and steamed out toward the drill grounds for torpedo practise. And that afternoon, Hawkeye told me, in good plain English, that I could save myself a whole lot of trouble by running away.

We were plowing along full speed, coming on the range, about to fire a torpedo at a destroyer about two miles dead ahead of us. I was leaning over the starboard rail on the forecastle, stretching my neck out-board, watching, through the spray that slapped up into my face, the water ahead of the ship's bow. I wanted to see the torpedo leave the tube.

"Say, *you*," Hawkeye growled in my in-board ear, "did you ever read 'The Count of Monte Cristo'?"

I didn't pull in my head for fear I'd miss seeing that torpedo leave the tube.

"Say!" he growled again—this time giving me a dig in the ribs—"did you ever read 'The Count——' "

"Yes! Yes! Yes!" I answered without pulling in my head. "What's 'The Count of Monte Cristo' got to do with torpedoes?"

"Nothing," he replied. "But all those miserable years the fellow in that story goes through is ping-pong to what you're going through from now on—unless you run away."

"Yeah?" I said.

And then out of our starboard tube shot the torpedo.

Funny thing. After shooting ahead of us a distance of about five hundred yards, that torpedo took a queer notion. It began veering off to the right, at first gradually, then more and more sharply, till it was moving in a circle. Round and round it swung. Soon it was abeam; then off the quarter, still swinging around.

It came right back and struck us amidships! If she'd been loaded, eh?

"See that?" I had to shout at the top of my voice to make Hawkeye hear, for every man on the upper decks was roaring. "See that? Maybe it'll give you a pointer. Now that old boy Exec's gone you think you'll make me run away. All right; hop to it! Only just look out you don't heave any boomerangs, that's all."

He wiggled the point of his nose at me. I felt myself growing warm, so I eased away from him.

RIGHT off the bat Hawkeye began using his fangs.

My watch had the duty from four to eight that afternoon. When "pipe down" to supper went, I told Snootful and Scotty to go ahead down and eat; to never mind waiting for their reliefs. This left three of us on the bridge, which was more than enough to handle what little signal work was going on just then. There was only one ship out there with us—the destroyer that had been acting as our target.

Hawkeye, standing below the bridge, saw Snoots and Scotty going down. Up he came.

"What's the idea of half the watch leaving the bridge without being relieved?" he shot at me.

"Half?" I said. "First time I ever heard two is half of five. Why—I thought a couple of 'em might be hungry, so I told 'em to go ahead down and eat."

He grinned, as he turned and started down the ladder.

"That thought'll cost you something," he flung up.

He was right. The next morning the captain, after listening to Hawkeye sling mud at me for fifteen straight minutes, turned and told me I was a quartermaster second-class. So the thought cost me several dollars in new chevrons—not to say a word about the reduction in pay.

That gave Hawkeye confidence. From then on I drew a job every time I got within smelling range of him.

"O Breeze, get a bucket o' water and a swab."

He'd cackle that at me about twenty times a day. There was always a deck that needed swabbing—out on one of the bridge-wings, or down in the conning-tower, the chart house, steering-engine room.

And always, coming in on the finish of one job, he'd ease alongside of me with another.

"Breeze, break out the sewing-machine and mend all the flags."

And it's the truth that he deliberately tore flags by the dozen, just so he could keep me busy. The big buzzard!

Mend bunting and swab decks—those were his two stand-bys. But now and then he'd give me a little variety. He'd chase me aloft to reeve off new halyards or oil the blocks, when this was unnecessary; or have me down scrubbing the paint off the storeroom bulkheads.

There was no dodging him. He was everywhere. I had only to look around to see those rat's eyes and that long wiggling nose, and hear—

"Breeze, while you're resting——"

While I was resting. What made it so hard was that all this was in addition to the eight hours signal duty I had each day.

There was a four-hour day watch, and another at night. I got only one all-night-in in four. I had to go to quarters every morning and go through "monkey drill." The rest of the gang used to get a little snooze in the afternoons. But not Breeze—not if Hawkeye knew it.

If those rat's eyes of his couldn't find a little spot on the bridge rail where the paint had been scraped off, he'd out with his knife and make a bare spot. Then—

"Breeze, get a pot o' paint," he'd yap at me, "and touch this up."

Touch up! Once he got me started, he'd make me paint the whole wing of the bridge. And toward the finish he'd come easing around with that dirty sneer of his and tell me that it didn't look uniform to have one wing painted and the other not.

"Better paint the other wing too," he'd say. Touch up, eh? Oh, it was rich.

In civilian life a man dissatisfied with his job doesn't overstep his constitutional rights if he takes off his overalls. I've done it many a time. But you can't do that in the Navy. You have to take it as it's handed out. Like it you may, or lump it you may, but take it you must.

Getting down to brass tacks, Hawkeye was overstepping himself. I was a second-class petty officer, senior to every man in the gang but Hawkeye himself, and, according to regulations, didn't rate all this dirty work. But it's not always what you rate, in the Navy.

And so it went, for two, three, six months. It was "Breeze this," and "Breeze that." Those rat's eyes were on me from breakfast to taps.

Several times I tried for transfer. Once a quartermaster on the *Delaware* would have traded with me; at another time, a fellow on the *Kansas;* again, a man on the destroyer *Doxie*, the ship old boy Exec was now commanding—but I couldn't get a request through our signal officer. Hawkeye had him hypnotized.

The new executive officer wouldn't listen to me. This fellow was nothing like our old boy Exec; he had a different system of ethics. The best I could get out of him was—

"Get out of here!"

The chaplain. Oh, he'd give me lots of advice—"Trust and obey." But help me get off the ship? Nay, nay. I was the only man aboard who could play the organ.

Oh, it was rich. What made things still worse was that Hawkeye, who was a very short timer, was now talking about re-enlisting on the ship. There went the last hope.

ONLY a few of the signal force knew the why for of all these troubles. What few I had told of it, I had asked not to tell Snootful. I was afraid if Snoots learned the truth—that it had begun with my landing him on the bridge—he would start something with Hawkeye; and that wouldn't help bring Hawkeye down to reason.

Occasionally the fellows used to give me a hand at these odd jobs, on the sly. But Hawkeye put an end to that, when one day he caught Snootful helping me clean up the navigator's storeroom. This was a ten-by-ten compartment, deep down in the after part of the ship.

Hawkeye might have been standing there in the doorway glaring at us for an hour, for all Snoots and I knew, busy as we were scrubbing paint-work.

"Say, you," he growled at Snootful, "when did you suddenly fall in love with work?"

Snoots, bending over the bucket of water wringing out his paint-work rag, looked up, his broad face flushed from exertion but wearing its habitual grin.

"Who, me?"

"Yes, you!"

Snoots continued to twist and twist on his paint-work rag.

"Well?"

"It's all right if I wanna help a guy out, ain't it?"

"No it ain't all right!" Hawkeye snarled. "This is a one-man job! If I wanted two on it, I'd put two on it!"

Snootful was decent enough about it.

"I didn't know I was doin' any harm, chief," he said. "I felt like workin'."

Hawkeye twisted his mouth.

"The —— you say!" he jeered. "Felt like workin', eh? All right. Tell you what you can do: Get your fingers around the handle of a chipping-hammer, and mosey up to the conning-tower. After you chip, scrape and wire-brush the deck up there, smear on a coat o' red-lead. When it dries, a couple o' coats o' shellac."

With that Hawkeye turned to leave us. Straightening up, Snootful halted him—

"Say, chief, just what's the idear?"

Hawkeye wiggled his nose.

"Wha' d'yuh mean?"

"Mean?" Snoots threw his paint-work rag on deck and squared away. "I mean just what's this idear o' you ridin' Breeze like y'are!"

Hawkeye turned pale.

"Since when has a chief petty officer got to account for his doings to a seaman?" He pointed a long finger at Snoots. "If you know when you're well off, you'll sniff into your own affairs!"

After which he went. Red as a lobster and wild-eyed, Snoots turned to me.

"Look here, Breeze! what'd you do to that bird?"

"Oh, it's just a little personal——"

"To —— with that!" he snapped me off. "I wanna know! I'm doggoned if I'm gonna scrub paint-work an' chip decks fer the sake of a guy that's done a trick so rotten he's ashamed to tell about it! What'd you do to that bird?"

By this time Snootful Bennet was a shipmate I couldn't afford to lose. So I told him. I gave him all the details connected with getting him on the bridge, that morning following the gullet-slitting affair, a year and a half before. When I had finished, Snoots was glaring at me like a red-eyed bull. It was several minutes before he spoke.

"Why the —— didn't yuh tell me?" he demanded. "Why didn't yuh tell me up there that day on the fo'c'sle that yuh had to go over his head to git me on the bridge?"

"Because I didn't know it till after I'd braced Hawkeye," I answered. "And any way, what's that got to do with chipping and red-leading the conning-tower deck?"

Only once in the eight years I was shipmates with Snoots Bennet— We were in three different fleets together—the Atlantic, Pacific and Asiatic; yes, sir, shipmates on sixteen different ships and three shore stations. We were shipmates in war and in peace, in joy and gloom, in pain and pleasure —but, to get back to the story, only once, I say, during those eight wild years did I see him look like that. His eyes bulged and blazed; thick veins stood out on his sweating forehead. Head thrust forward, thick lips parted, teeth showing—he looked for all the world like a gorilla.

He began snarling, thumping on his chest with those big sledge-hammer hands. "—— of a thing to do! Me side-kickin' with yuh a year an' a half; an' on'y now I find out yuh went in a hole to git me fer a side-kicker! —— of a thing to do!"

"Well, didn't you stop Gullets from——"

"To —— with that!" he cut me off. "Shut your trap!"

He commenced doing the caged-lion glide back and forth across the storeroom.

"There's just one thing is doggone clear to me," he resumed presently: "I gota lick Hawkeye. So it's account o' me he's ridin' yuh, hey? All right. Watch me. I'll git that bird ashore. I can't clout him on board, o' course, 'cause they'd send me over the road fer it. But I'll git him on the beach."

"Now wait a minute, Snoots," I came in. "You know what Hawkeye can do with his dukes."

"I know he's yeller!" he snapped; "an' that's all I have to know. I on'y wanna git one wallop in on 'im."

"And before you do that he'll get a hundred in on you."

"Love taps. He can't hit. One clout is all I want."

"He'll close both your eyes, cut you up in general. You'll swing and swing—on air—till you're all petered out, winded—"

I was talking to the bulkheads. Snoots was gone.

It's a fact, though, that Hawkeye was a boxer of class. He wasn't a fighter; he couldn't hit. But as a boxer, he would have been well-nigh the best light middleweight in the fleet, but for one thing—a long streak. He showed his yellow the instant the other fellow landed his first wallop. He had whirlwind speed and cleverness, but no guts.

SOME one in Washington had a stroke of big-heartedness, the upshot of which was a sight-seeing trip for us to Europe. About half of the fleet went, in company as far as the Azores, where they scattered, each ship making for a different port. Our ship's destination was Marseilles, France.

All this was before they commenced tangling tails over there.

On that trip across, Hawkeye added the last straw.

One night on my eight to twelve watch the telescope was broken. Right after coming on watch I had put it in the chart-board, in good condition. I hadn't used it again during the entire watch. When my relief, the signal quartermaster with the mid-watch, picked it up he found the outer, far-end lens smashed. It looked as if it had been done with a hammer.

Of course I couldn't prove that Hawkeye had broken that glass. A dozen fellows had seen him prowling below the bridge that night, till near midnight—but that did me no good. No one saw him climb up on top of the chart house, and from there reach over the bridge rail to the chart-board for the glass, and, after giving it a tap with a hammer, put it back in the chart-board. No; I couldn't prove it. But I *know* he did just that.

The next morning the captain ruled that I, being the man in charge of the watch, should have held that glass in my hand from eight o'clock that evening till midnight. And he was right.

More new chevrons, I thought. But no; the old man had a human streak that morning.

"No liberty in Marseilles," was my sentence.

WE STEAMED into Marseilles one fine morning in September. It's a long narrow harbor, closed off from the outside by a long artificial breakwater.

She was a snappy ship. No sooner had we moored to our buoy, than the boatswain's mates were yelling—

"Lay aft all the liberty party!"

About eleven o'clock, from the top-side rail I watched the two hundred or so of tars, all dolled up in liberty blues, line up on the port side of the quarter-deck to be inspected and checked out. They were off for a seventy-two hour sprint. Snoots was down there among the gang, grinning gloriously and licking his chops in anticipation of the champagne that would soon be delighting his gullet, and that only cost, as we had already learned, five francs or a dollar a quart.

What with the thousand and one consuls, ambassadors, attaches that came fluttering over the starboard gangway, the officer of the deck was a busy boy, too busy to be bothered with the liberty party. He had turned that job over to the boatswain.

This boatswain was an old, weather-toughened former gob, whom time and brawn had wrought into a warrant officer.

The steam launch, which was to tow the string of boats in to the landing, had broken down. The delay was causing the waiting gobs much impatience.

"Let's hail one of these civilian tugs, sir," some one in the ranks spoke up. "We'll pay him to tow us in."

"All right," the boatswain answered. "Who can speak French?"

I almost went through the deck when Snootful stepped out.

"I kin, sir."

"Atta boy!" The boatswain pointed to a megaphone on deck. "Take that horn and hail that fellow off there."

Snootful picked up the megaphone and stepped over to the rail, his eyes glued on a tug lying to about fifty yards off.

"Do it nice and polite now, lad," the boatswain cautioned. "Give him the genuine stuff—choice frog."

I can't make this as funny as it was.

Snootful lifted the megaphone to his mouth, gave his midship portion a few wiggles, *à la* hulla-hulla, then shouted:

"On ze tug there! La la!"

He wiggled, as the man in the pilot-house window on the tug put one hand up to his ear.

"Come alongside ze battle-ship and pick up ze string of ze boats and take ze liberty party in to ze beach. Sniff sniff! Make ze snap! Wee wee! Shake ze leg!"

That was as much as you could hear. When the roar had died down, Snootful stood there scratching the back of his neck, looking grossly insulted, and puzzled.

"Wasn't it all right, sir?"

The boatswain was looking him up and down, as if debating whether to put him in a strait-jacket or keel-haul him.

"Who ever told you that was French?"

"That's the way all the frogs I ever knew talked, sir. See?" Snoots pointed at the tug, which was now coming ahead, pointing for our gangway. "He got me, sir!"

Snoots was right. A moment later, the skipper of the tug, leaning out of his pilot-house window, called up—

"You weesh ze tug, sair?"

"You win," the boatswain said to Snoots. "I'll shoot the next man that tells me brains count."

Then he turned to address the skipper of the tug.

Ten minutes later the long string of gob-packed boats moved in to the landing.

THAT afternoon, Hawkeye being ashore, for the first time in months I had an opportunity to get a little snooze in the daytime. Immediately after dinner I stretched out in a quiet corner on the topside.

I snored right on through the whole afternoon, lost out on supper, and probably wouldn't have waked up till they began scrubbing decks next morning. The captain's orderly broke me out.

"Breeze, the captain wants you," he said.

"The captain! Me?"

I scrambled to my feet.

"Yes. And better snap it up. I've been huntin' about an hour for you."

"Holy gee!" I said, noting that it was near dark. "I've been pounding my ear since noon!"

I went aft and entered the cabin.

"You want me, sir?"

The captain looked up from a pile of letters.

"Why, yes." He reached out and picked up a letter. "I have here a communication that I thought might be of interest to you." He looked up, smiling. "You remember the fellow who wanted to cut your head off?"

"I dream of him every night, sir," I replied.

"Afraid he'll sneak aboard some night, eh?" he grinned. "Well, lad, you can rest easy from now on. They picked him up in Chicago. He's safe under lock and key, with no butcher-knives handy."

He paused for a few moments.

"Perhaps having that on your mind has had something to do with your apparent laxity. You haven't done any too well lately—have you?"

I tried to speak up in defense.

"Tut, tut, tut," he cut me off. "I'm too busy to listen to complaints. The point is, as senior man on the bridge, you'll be in charge of the signal force—temporarily. And I want the best you've got! We probably won't get another chief till we get back home."

"Another chief, sir?" I wondered what the old boy was raving about.

"Yes. The doctor says that Smith will have to go to the *Solace*; she's due here tomorrow."

When I tell you that the *Solace* was the fleet hospital ship, and that by Smith he meant Hawkeye, you'll understand why all I did was stand there and blink. Things had been happening during my long snooze up on the topside!

"And he is not coming back to this ship!" he went on. "A bar-room fighter isn't fit to be a chief petty officer. He can't be a chief petty officer on my ship!"

"Well, I'll do my best, sir," was all I could think of.

"That's the idea!" he shot back. "That's all I want. Just take hold of things as if you were a chief quartermaster. And now, get out of here!"

Outside the cabin door I nailed the orderly.

"Say, what happened to Hawkeye?"

"Why," he answered, grinning, "they carried him back aboard about three o'clock this afternoon, with a broken nose. Him and Snootful Bennet mixed things over in town. They say he gave Snoots an awful cuttin' up; closed both his eyes and bumped his mug all up. But Snoots stayed right with him. They fought about an hour. Then Snoots hit him for the first time. They say it was a terrible smash, right on the point of Hawkeye's beezer."

I went forward to the sick bay. Hawkeye, his face covered with bandages, lay groaning on a bunk.

"Must have been an awful rap," I whispered to one of the pharmacist's mates.

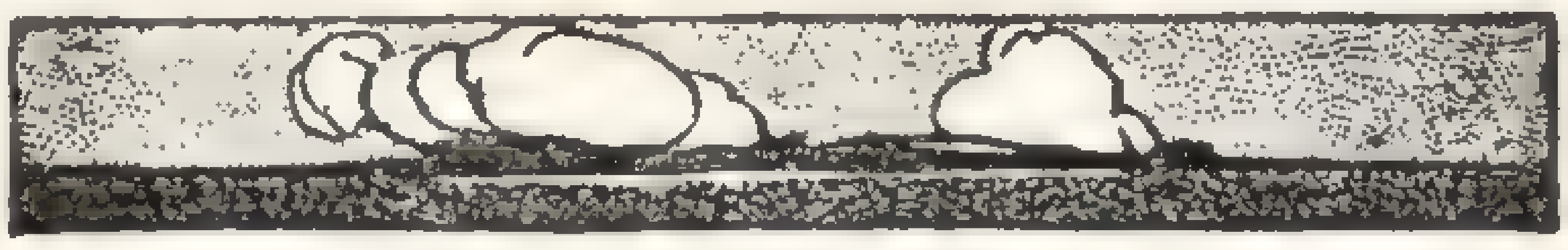
"You'd say worse than that if you saw that nose," he replied. "He goes to the *Solace* tomorrow. From now on he'll have a nose like a figure six."

Walking aft, I again met the orderly.

"Breeze," he said, "the captain says to tell you that your restriction is lifted."

So beachward I dashed. After about an hour's search I found Snootful in a place called "The Black Horse." His face all covered with plaster and swollen, he was a sight. And all I could get out of him was—

"Breesh, ol' timer, I got a awfa, awfa shnootful."



A DREAM COME TRUE

by Frank H. Huston

TA SUNKA KO PEA, better known to the white as Crazy Horse, was one of the big chiefs of the Tetonwan Sioux, reaching his greatest fame as one of the two Generals who wiped out Custer.

As a warrior he may be compared in ability and general characteristics with the man he was instrumental in defeating. Spectacular and vain as Custer, "superb" as Hancock, he was even a greater cavalry man than Sheridan. When Reno attacked the upper village where Horse's band was camped, the chief drove Reno back, and learning that Gall at the lower end was attacked by Yellow Hair, led his warriors *à la* Sheridan's Ride to Gall's assistance, quickly deciding the issue.

Long afterward Ko Pea brought his band in, surrendering it to Capt. Clark of the 2nd Cavalry, in command of the Pawnee Scouts, as successor to Frank North—in command only as there never was or never could be one able to fill the moccasins of the greatest unpress-agented chief of scouts who ever rode a trail—Maj. Frank North (Colee-Cuetin).

Clark brought the band to Ft. Robinson, whence they were later removed to Standing Rock. Here Ko Pea became restless and indignant at the action of the "Indian Ring," for its agents were at that time more than a "leetle raw," and hatched a plot that, had it been successful, would have wiped out another white general officer and inflicted a loss of greater proportion than the Custer affair.

Suspicion on the part of the authorities led to a scout being detailed to secure evidence of what was going on *sub rosa.*

He laid suit to the hand of a young squaw who lived in a teepee next to the chief's, and she, accepting his advances, met him nightly just outside the lodge. Here in Indian fashion they would stand for hours with a robe drawn over and covering them both, but not so closely that he could not hear all that took place in the chief's lodge but a few feet away. As the scout was a "breed" and this was the usual method of Sioux courtship naturally no notice was taken of the couple, and when the scout's reports showed that the time was ripe for the outbreak, orders were issued to arrest and confine first Crazy Horse, and then others of the plotters.

Shortly previous Ko Pea had been walking on the prairie when he came upon the carcass of a gray eagle, his personal and particular medicine. Greatly perturbed, he returned abruptly to the camp, saying "I have just found my dead body in the prairie yonder."

A few days later he related a dream he had had the night before, in which it seemed he was riding a white horse on an elevated plateau, surrounded by his enemies, who had big guns and cannon. He was killed by them, but not with bullets.

He always claimed he bore a charmed life, his medicine being so strong that he could not be killed by a bullet, and had any whites seen him when he rode over Custer, they would have believed him correct and justified in his assertion.

The military quickly apprehended him and, surrounding him with some twenty soldiers, marched him to the guard-house, in front of which several howitzers were standing.

Just before reaching the guard-house, a number of his people gathered near by with an idea of rescuing him. One who held a white pony by a halter-shank called to the chief to run and mount while they held off the troops.

The chief drew his knife and endeavored to cut his way out; but Sergeant Jenkins of H. Co., 14th Inf., ran his bayonet through him from behind and was quickly followed by others, who, however, met the chief face to face. Stabbed repeatedly, even after falling, struggling ineffectively against overwhelming odds, he saw his dream come true, the last great chief to die fighting.

Peace to his ashes, he was an American, and a patriot according to his lights.

SWAIN'S BURNING

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE

by Arthur D Howden Smith

Author of "Swain's Vengeance," "Swain's Stone," etc.

TOSSING waves and a chill wind from the north. The Pentland Firth was a heaving gray floor; the cliffs of Caithness lowered dark in the south, outlined by the white tempest of the rushing surf, torn by the fangs of the black rock-reefs that stretched in an interminable barrier, striving, always unsuccessfully, never dismayed, to ward off ocean's assault upon the land. Northeast a blurr on the horizon was Haey, first of the Orkneys. Westward, behind the unseen masses of the Sudreyar* and Ireland, the pallid sun was sinking into a monstrous pile of clouds that bellied and whirled before the pressure of the Iceland gale.

Midway of the Firth, steering a precarious course between the hostile impulses of wind and currents, crawled a great dragonship, her red and gold figurehead dipping and plunging as she climbed the short, choppy waves and dropped precipitously into the hollows. She showed only a shred of her big square sail, but her sixty oars rose and fell, rose and fell, with a monotonous, insistent rhythm, which was undisturbed even when the booming combers topped her shallow waist and rolled along her swaying gangway, sloshing ankle-deep among the rowing-benches and spurting in creamy jets from the oar-holes.

"Ha-ha!" panted the oarsmen. "Ha-ha! Hi-heh! Ha-ha! Hi-heh!"

And sometimes a few of them would break into a wild, toneless chant, keeping time to the oar-swing. More than once the singers were choked to silence by a torrent of spray that slapped into their faces, dousing mouths and eyes; but while they might be unable to breathe for the space of a stroke, they never missed the feathering, immersion, pull and recovery in unison with their comrades. They shook their shaggy, bearded heads, until the water flew, and bent their broad backs to the drive of the long, supple, bucking sweeps of toughened ash.

The wind howled overhead; the roar of the surf was a distant menace on their starboard quarter; the waves, tricky at best in those narrow seas, heaped and tumbled from every direction. But from one end of the packed waist to the other there was not a single look of concern, not a mutter of fear or complaint. Tall, thick-thewed, wide-shouldered, their clothing tattered and salt-stained, their armor and weapons rusty, they were men who had dared death in every form too frequently to be affected by the ordinary perils of the storm.

On the poop beside the steersmen, who fought with the steering-sweeps to keep the vessel on her course, stood Swain Olaf's son, and there was a kind of fierce pride in his bleak gaze as he conned *Deathbringer* homeward. He knew the dragon as a rider knows his horse. He knew his picked crew of viking-farers, most of them men who had sailed with him for three years on forays the length and breadth of England and Ireland and far to the south, in France and Spain. He knew, too, the dangers which lay in wait for them at that moment, with snow flurries offshore, weeks beyond the period usually considered safe for the undecked longships of the Norse seafarers of the Orkney group. But that made the feat of returning safe to his stead at Gairsey all the more worth while; and he was not less satisfied because it compensated in some part for the ill-luck of their voyage.

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*Hebrides.

He was talking of this, now, as he guided his brother, Gunni, and Osbiorn Grim's son, the chief of his housecarls, who manned the jerking steering-sweeps, larboard and starboard.

"Bear down, Gunni—hard, boy! You leave it to Osbiorn to fend her off. There's a nasty current runs in here. So! Hold it. Ease up, Osbiorn. Meet this wave head-on. Well done! There will be women who have wept their eyes dry and men for sharing our gear by now in Orkney, eh? But we shall surprize them all. I want much to see Jarl Rognvald's face when we beach at Orphir.

" 'You go too often a-viking, Swain,' said he when we sailed forth in Autumn. 'Will you never be content?' And I said: 'No, Lord Jarl, I'm never content when the viking fever pricks in my blood, and what is more I'll quarter the seas, whatever foes or weather may be abroad, until I find trace of that witch Frakork and her foul grandson, Olvir Rosta, who slew my father, Olaf, and Valthiof, my brother, and afterward would have robbed us of all our lands, if we had not taken care of Jarl Paul in a way you know of, Lord Jarl.'

" 'Oh, yes, I know that story,' he said in his dry way. 'It is little you think of Jarls, Swain.' 'Why, that depends upon the Jarls,' said I. 'Humph,' said he. 'The Orkneys are an ill place for small men and Jarls, between you and Frakork. The witch slew Jarl Harald Hakon's son with a poisoned shirt—although men said she meant it for his brother Jarl Paul; but you took care of Jarl Paul when you kidnapped him and thrust him into a Scots monastery, if you did what you say you did, Swain, which I doubt.' "

Swain burst into a bellow of laughter that triumphed over the uproar of the tempest.

" 'What else might I have done, Lord Jarl?' said I. 'The saints preserve me from thinking upon it,' said he. 'But if he has all his parts he is a fortunate man.' 'All save his hair, Lord Jarl,' I answered him. 'Humph,' said he again, 'it may be so. Yet I tell you, Swain, you are foolish to waste your time viking-faring instead of employing your men upon your lands.' 'Why should my men farm, Lord Jarl,' I asked, 'when there is booty to be gained for the taking in other parts?' "

Osbiorn spoke up.

"Ah, Swain, but the Jarl will have the laugh upon you this time, for what have we to show for our journey, but scars from oar-bite and a few trinkets such as women use?"

"You speak truly," admitted Swain, "but I would have you recall that we have not lost a man, despite that we have four times come to slaying frays, and we have stayed from home later than any longship in my time. We have had honor, if we have not had plunder. We can not always be fortunate."

"Perhaps," replied his brother, Gunni, eyes never leaving the racing seas over the dragon stem. "But it is my thought that our mistake was in following that report Olvir Rosta had been in Ireland. There is small gain to be had in Ireland. Franceward, now——"

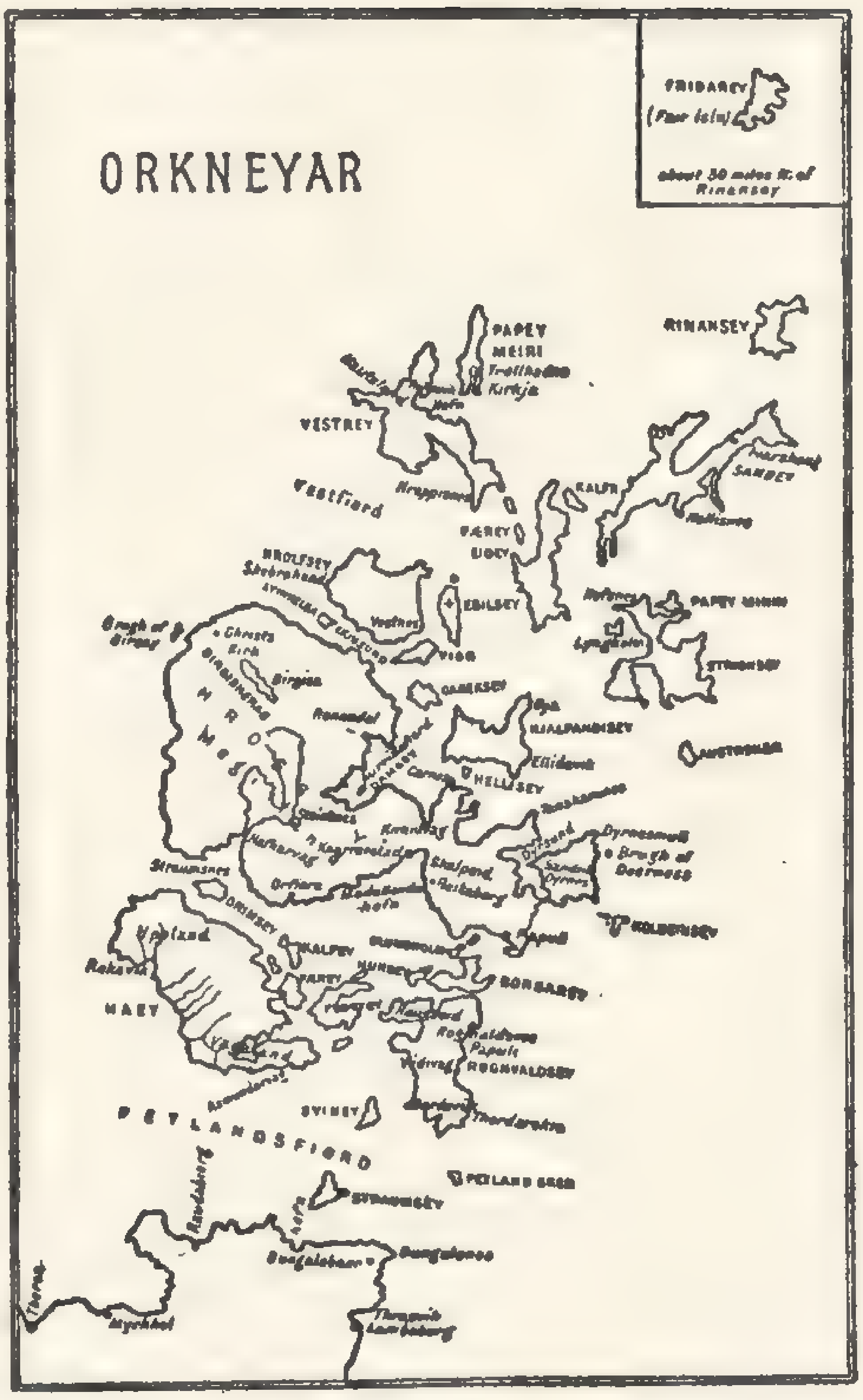
Swain's face clouded.

"You forget yourself, Gunni," he said bitterly. "Vengeance comes before plunder. I would sink this dragon and all she holds of men and gear, myself, too, if by so doing I might uncover Frakork and Olvir! But the day will come. Have I not prayed to the Old Gods and the White Christ and the blessed Saints Magnus and Olaf? It will come, and then——"

A hoarse hail from the forecastle, where a knot of men off rowing-duty huddled under such protection as was provided by the huge, up-curving figurehead and the low bulwarks above the decked storage space.

"Small boats to landward!"

Swain sprang to the break of the shallow poop, and stared out to starboard through the scud and sea-wrack. A mile or so ahead a dismasted fishing-boat was bouncing in the turmoil of waters, the sport of wind and currents which gradually impelled it toward the dim line of the rock-reefs. A man crouched in the stern,


ORKNEYAR
FRIDAREY
(Fair Isle)
about 30 miles N. of Rinansey
RINANSEY
PAPEY MEIRI
Trollhedin
Kirkja
VESTREY
Vestfiord
Hreppisnes
SANDEY
KALFR
FAREY
EGILSEY
HROLFSEY
PAPEY MINNI
Lyngholm
Brugh of Birgsey
Christs Kirk
Birgisa
VIGR
GAREKSEY
STRONSEY
Rennadal
Ellidavik
HELLISEY
HJALPANDISEY
AUSTOHLDA
Ekkjalsnes
Straumsnes
Orfiara
Kirkjuvag
Skalpeid
Ossibakr
Dyrnessvall
Brugh of Deerness
KOLBEINSEY
Papuli
BORGAREY
KALFEY
FAREY
HUNDEY
Upland
Raknvik
HAEY
Rognvaldsvoe
Papule
Vidivagr
ROGNVALDSEY
SVINEY
Thorderakrs
PETLANDSFIORD
PETLAND SKER
SVINANESEY
Dungalsbaer
Dungalsnes
Thorsa
Myrkhol
Thengaris
Lambaborg

feebly endeavoring to keep head to wind with the assistance of a single oar.

"None but a fool would be out to-day," growled Osbiorn.

"He is only a Scot," asserted Gunni confidently.

Swain frowned in perplexity, biting at his red-gold beard that was blown about his eyes.

"It is probable that you are right," he conceded, "yet——"

"We shall have trouble enough making a lee as it is, with dusk at hand," counseled Osbiorn.

"We will take him off," decided Swain. "As you say, Gunni, he is likely to be one of these foolish Scots, who deserves to drown. But I do not like to pass any man in such a sea. Bear off to starboard. Stoutly, carls! Bury those oar-blades. Catch deep—together! Put your backs to it—so! Why should we fear Rann's Bath, who have known worse than this?"

The dragon crawled slowly, like some monstrous water creature, part reptile, part insect, across the billowing expanse. The man in the fishing-boat had seen her now, and he rose half-erect, steadying himself by the gunwale with one hand, shielding his eyes with the other.

Nearer they came, and nearer, and Swain measured the distance with crafty eyes. Then he took a spear from a chest that was bolted to the deck, and tied a strong rope to a loop that was run through a hole near the butt, so that it might be slung at a man's shoulder. With the spear in his hand, and the rope coiled loosely on the deck beside him, he took his stand at the starboard gunwale.

"Closer," he called to Gunni and Osbiorn. "Lower that stroke, oarsmen. Slow, all!"

The man in the little boat stood erect, prepared to catch the line, but Swain motioned to him to drop flat out of the way. Then Swain, balanced on the swaying deck, raised the spear above his shoulder, took a quick step forward, and hurled it with the whole strength of his iron muscles. Straight and low it sped, passed the open space of water, the line snaking behind it, and plunged into the sea on the farther side of the little boat, the line rasping across the midmost thwart.

The castaway dived for it head-first, made a rough loop about his waist, heedless of the dangling spear, and plunged overboard into the smother. A shout from Swain brought several men aft along the slippery gangway from the forecastle, and they hauled away at the line with a diligence that drew the castaway at such a pace as to bury him under the waves. He was half-drowned when he reached the gunwale just forward of the poop, and Swain stooped to lift him overside with no appreciable effort, because of the man's slim bulk.

"Heh," exclaimed Swain in surprize, as he stretched the fellow on the deck in front of the poop. "Here is no Scotsman or common man of any race. Look to his dress."

Indeed, the man's over-jerkin was of bear's fur, and his tight-fitting breeches were of fine-tanned reindeer hide. A gold chain hung at his neck, and there were gold bands on his wrists and forearms, besides a big signet ring upon one finger. His thin face was dark and proud, but revealed evident marks of dissipation.

One of the crew fetched a cup of mead from the cabin beneath the poop, and Swain dribbled the heady stuff between the man's lips, with the result that presently he coughed, opened his eyes and struggled to sit erect.

"So it was not an ale-dream!" he muttered, grinning.

"What?" asked Swain, while the others stood around and listened.

"The storm, and the dragon out of the west, and the spear-line, and you, friend."

"It is not certain that I am your friend," returned Swain curtly. "How did you come to be in such a plight?"

"I had been visiting MacLean of Gia Firth, and we sat late over the ale last night, yes, all night, as it comes to me now; and when I would have started home in the morning, they told me no small boat could live in the sea, but I said that Norsemen could sail anywhere. So I went."

He smiled a thought ruefully, and glanced quickly at those around him.

"You are Orkney-folk?" he asked suddenly.

Swain nodded.

"Jarl Rognvald's men?" the stranger pressed.

"I am Swain Olaf's son," said Swain.

The castaway's face brightened.

"I know of you! The viking-farer—he who brought in Jarl Rognvald and carried off Jarl Paul. You would not hold it against me because I am my father's son."

"Who are you?" demanded Swain.

The man hesitated.

"I dwell at Thorsa," he answered hesitantly.

"That means nothing to me."

"I am Erlend, son to Jarl Harald Hakon's son," said the dark youth, with a hint of defiance.

Swain's eyes bored into his face.

"Ha," grunted Swain. "And *he* it was died of Frakork's poisoned shirt! Are you his heir?"

The dark youth assented uneasily.

"Jarl Rognvald will be glad to have you where he can set his finger on you," remarked Swain. "He shares his jarldom now with young Harald Maddad's son, your cousin, and he would be very loath to consider the prospect of dividing it into thirds to make a portion for you. Yes, I consider you should make an excellent present for him."

Erlend Harald's son cast a desperate glance around the ring of harsh, bearded faces. Then looked across the heaving gunwale at the gray wastes of the sea.

"I will pay you a fair price to set me ashore at Thorsa," he offered.

"You could not pay me as much as Jarl Rognvald would," returned Swain. "We'll clip you, as we did your uncle, Jarl Paul, and leave you in a monastery where you can drink ale the rest of your life."

A gleam of hope dawned in Erlend's eyes.

"Men say you turned against Jarl Paul because he received Witch Frakork and Olvir Rosta back into his friendship," he said tentatively.

Swain scowled, and his reply rumbled from the depths of the immense barrel-chest which gave him greater endurance than any man in the North possessed.

"Yes," he roared. "And all who admit friendship for Frakork and Olvir are likewise my enemies. Let me hear of such and they shall feel the edge of my sword and the burning of lighted brands such as those with which Olvir fired my father's skalli at Dungelsbae and drove both him and Valthiof, my brother, forth to die upon the spears of a hundred men. Say little of Frakork or Olvir, Erlend, if you would live to taste Jarl Rognvald's mercy—which is like to be easier than mine, if I am aroused."

"It is strange that you do not pursue Frakork and Olvir to their steading, since you feel so hostile to them," persisted Erlend with the courage of despair.

There was a fleck of foam upon Swain's beard, and his hand stole to the hilt of his sword.

"Fool!" he growled. "Do you think I would spare any effort if I might track them down? Back and forth over all the seas I have been, without discovering so much as a trace, so that I am beginning to believe it true what some men report, that they have fled to Iceland. Next Spring I shall fare west and north and make certain."

A cunning look crept into Erlend's face.

"It seems, then," he commented, "that I have somewhat which you lack."

"Your life, perhaps," rejoined Swain grimly.

"No, information where Frakork and Olvir hide."

Swain studied him with savage intensity.

"Ah, in that case we may think of ways to persuade you to talk."

With a celerity in contrast to the supine attitude he had maintained since he was dragged aboard, Erlend leaped between two of the men around him and gained the gunwale by the break of the poop, clinging by one hand to the ladder which led to the steersmen's space.

"Come near me, and I go overboard," he cried. "And my secret with me."

There was a note in his voice, a gleam in his eyes, which carried conviction. Swain waved back the men who started after him.

"Stay, Erlend, and tell us more," Swain called to him. "If you are not deceiving us we may arrive at a composition."

Erlend held to his grip on the poop ladder, but he declined to come down from his precarious perch.

"I know what I know," he said; "and I tell it not, except upon proper terms. Pass me your word upon your father's soul to land me safe and unharmed at Thorsa and I will tell all."

Swain held aloft the cross-hilt of his sword.

"If you tell me truthfully where Frakork and her spawn lurk, I swear by the Cross and Odin and Thor's Hammer and the White Christ and my father's soul, be it in Valhalla or Purgatory, that you shall go ashore at Thorsa whole and unharmed. But if you lie——"

He left the sentence unfinished, and Erlend dropped to the deck.

"I am satisfied," answered the castaway. "Moreover, men say that you are true to your oath, Swain. And a thing which you forget is that I am one you might expect to be ready to aid you in slaying Frakork and Olvir, since Frakork was the means of my father's death, and that in such a way as to lose me my rightful inheritance, by reason Jarl Paul suspected my father of plotting against him with Frakork."

"Touching your inheritance I have nothing to say," replied Swain. "But it has been said without denial that Frakork intended the shirt, not for your father, but for Jarl Paul. She was a close friend to Jarl Harald Hakon's son."

"Whoever she intended it for, she slew my father with it," insisted Erlend with unmistakable anger; "and thereby she injured me doubly both by his loss and by the estate that was withheld from me. But we talk to no purpose. Did you never think to look for her in Scotland, Swain?"

"I have looked for her far and wide in Scotland," retorted Swain impatiently. "She is not there. She and Olvir fled thence in a long ship after they left their lands at Morkaorsbakki on the coast of Caithness when Jarl Paul was overthrown.

"Yes, they fled—to return. They landed by Staur in Sudrland on the coast of Scotland's Firth, and went secretly up into the country of the mountains, where only the wild hill-folk dwell, and there they have built and planted themselves a steading, with all their folk around them, on the bank of Hjalmundale's river. There are high mountains and spreading forests on every hand, and they have stayed so quiet that even the King of Scots believes they have fled oversea."

"How did you come to discover it?" demanded Swain sternly.

"At Thorsa I entertain many of the hill-folk who come to trade, and I had it from one of them."

"Why have not you, yourself, acted to take vengeance?"

There was a hint of contempt in Swain's tones, and Erlend flushed.

"I am not a man of much wealth," he returned with some dignity. And I have few followers, while they have upwards of a hundred tenants and housecarls. But it has been my intention, if the opportunity arrived, to attempt to waylay Frakork and Olvir when they went abroad."

"Humph," grunted Swain. "You shall be spared the trouble. I will take the task off your hands. It may be you have lied, but I think you are telling the truth. And if by any chance, you are not, I will surely take steps to punish you. In the meantime I will land you at Thorsa, and do you see to it that you do not speak of our conversation to any one. My advice to you, also, is to give over ale-drinking, and set yourself to becoming what a man of your birth should be."

And this was the occasion of the first meeting of Swain Olaf's son with Erlend Harald's son, which was to have richer fruits in the future than the mere furthering of Swain's vengeance upon the slayers of his father and brother, as shall be revealed in the proper place.

II

LIGHTS blazed in Jarl Rognvald's skalli at Orphir in Hrossey. The housecarls who sat at the long tables in the great hall pounded with fists and sword-hilts on the greasy planks. Dogs barked amongst the rushes. Men shouted greetings from the high table, and the Jarl, himself, stepped down and welcomed Swain with open arms. Not always had they been so friendly, but with Swain men were definitely one thing or the other. Times had been when Jarl Rognvald would cheerfully have cut his throat. Such times might come again. At this present they were comrades and allies.

"Ho, Swain, we had thought you dead," hailed the Jarl. "And men say that you won home at best with a bare ship and no booty."

"I bring that which is worth more to me than the spoil of princes," returned Swain.

"And what is that?"

There was a hush around them.

"I have found where Frakork and Olvir hide."

Jarl Rognvald clapped his back with lusty force. A well-made man, the Jarl, as noble in his presence as Swain, which is high praise; but where Swain's face was grim and vigilant, Jarl Rognvald's was open and cheery. Men loved him, yet found fault with his heedless generosity, his liking for hairbrained adventures and his readiness to heed whatever the last person poured into his ear. He had his faults. He did not take some of his duties as seriously as he should have, but he was a good lord and kind, and for Swain he had a whimsical admiration which was mingled with respect, for he was of those who had felt the heavy hand of the viking-farer's wrath.

"And how came you by that, Swain?" he asked now.

"I had it from one you know of, young Erlend Harald's son."

"Whose father was——"

"Yes, he."

A frown furrowed Jarl Rognvald's pleasant face.

"Why did you not fetch him here, Swain? I should like to have him where I can keep an eye upon him—or a finger, at need. We have two Jarls in these islands and that is enough. I do not want Erlend making trouble for me some day."

"He is no trouble-maker," retorted Swain. "An ale-bibber, without means or wealth to be dangerous."

"Yes, if he is left to himself," commented the Jarl gloomily. "However, if you let him go, it is a deed done. Where is Frakork's den?"

Swain recounted the information he had received from Erlend, and Jarl Rognvald nodded agreement with his judgment that it was correct.

"It has the sound of Frakork's wit. She would seek to remain close enough so that if an opportunity arose they might launch a fresh blow to recover their power in the Orkneys. It is a safe place, Swain; too safe for you. If you come at her from the sea, she will have spies to take account of you, and you can not reach her in the rear because of the Scots who guard the mountain-passes."

"I can reach her," answered Swain briefly.

"How?"

A shrill yelp came from the skalli door.

"Let me pass, varlets! Let me pass, or I will set Swain after you."

A bubble of laughter from the burly housecarls, and a little lad in his first buskins, a miniature sword strapped on his thigh, burst between the tables and ran to Swain with outflung arms.

"What have you brought me, Swain? How many did you slay this voyage? Where have you been? Did you see any sea-monsters? Did you see the man-eating people Bishop William told me of? Or the Paynims? Or the——"

"A question at a time, manling," begged Swain, swinging him aloft to kick his legs above the heads of the throng. "I fetched you an Irish dagger we had from a fray in the South. But what of you? Have you rendered good account of yourself?"

"Good enough," swaggered the boy. "Will you take me next Spring?"

"No, no, you must be first as tall as a man's sword. Now, peace!"

Swain turned his head to Jarl Rognvald.

"You asked me how I might reach Frakork, Lord Jarl. I hold the means in my two hands here."

"What? The youngling?"

"Even so—little Jarl Harald. His father, Jarl Maddad, rules Atjoklar* for the Scots king. Maddad owes me certain obligations, and will not be disposed to deny me guides and a free passage through his marches into Sudrland."

Jarl Rognvald cast at Swain a look which was compounded of amusement and exasperation.

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*Athole.

"You are never at a loss, Swain! First, you foist the boy upon me to share my jarldom because you say: 'Two Jarls rule with justice; one Jarl rules with force.' Then you make use of the circumstance of having aided his family to compass your vengeance."

"Jarl Paul, who had as good a title to one-half the islands as you did to the other half, made over his rights to the boy, who happens to be his nephew," returned Swain calmly. "Blame him, if you will. As for what I said, it is true; and if I did not have this means of coming at Frakork and Olvir I should find another."

Jarl Rognvald laughed shortly.

"I know you, Swain! And I would give much to have heard Jarl Paul acquainting you with his renunciation. The truth is, you thought that I was disposed to be unfriendly to you, and——"

"Was I right?" challenged Swain.

Jarl Rognvald flushed, but before he could answer little Jarl Harald spoke up.

"All men do what Swain wishes, Lord Jarl. Bishop William told me so, and *he* has talked to the pope."

Housecarls and noblemen, all in the hall, shouted with laughter. And Jarl Rognvald smiled, if unwillingly.

"In part, Swain, perhaps. Yes, in part you were right. But for that you had only your own domineering ways to thank. After all, I am Jarl."

Swain put down the boy, and bowed low.

"True, Lord Jarl, and is any more swift than I to pay my dues and give my service at your call?"

"No, no. You are Swain. And as Swain, I accept from you what I would not from other men. But let us end this bickering. When Spring comes you shall go to Jarl Maddad, and try your venture. In the meantime, we are celebrating Yule here at Orphir, and it is my desire that you and your following pass the feast with me."

Swain shook his head.

"I thank you for the favor you would show me, Lord Jarl, but I must be about the matter of my vengeance without delay."

"You are mad!" protested the Jarl. "At this time? In Winter? I tell you the mountain passes will be deep in snow. You might not pass them, even if——"

"Nevertheless, I am sure that I can reach Hjalmundale's river," said Swain firmly. "And I hold you to a promise you made me, Lord Jarl, when I first contracted alliance with you to bring you into these islands and establish you here, that you would aid me at my need in securing vengeance upon Frakork and Olvir."

"But in the depths of Winter, Swain! And after all, that old hag Frakork has seen the passing of her power and Olvir is good for nothing against us. Let them go, man! There are better ways to win name and gear."

Swain turned on his heel and walked to the door of the crowded hall.

"A promise is a promise," he remarked. "Yet if you will not keep it, you will not, and there is no more to be said. In that case, I will go with such men as I can raise myself."

Jarl Rognvald frowned angrily.

"You have still your rough tongue, I see," he exclaimed. "You leap to unjust conclusions, as usual. I have not refused you aid. What would you have of me?"

"One longship, and eighty men," replied Swain promptly. "I can raise at least as many more."

"Are you sure it will be enough?"

"I take two men for each of Frakork's."

"A mad scheme," fussed the Jarl. "You stay out in *Deathbringer* until all have thought you shattered by ice, and next you must be off in mid-Winter to traverse Scotland to slay enemies who may not be there. You will do well to escape with your life. Who would care to accompany you of his own free will?"

A shout went up from the hall.

"I'll go, Lord Jarl!" "And I!" "Hrolf Bitling offers!"

And tailing the deep voices of the housecarls, little Jarl Harald's piping tones proclaimed his willingness to aid.

"Count on me, Swain! I'd go, if there were but you and I alone. And my father shall aid you, for I will speak stoutly to him and my mother."

The howl of laughter that followed sent the smoke from hearth-fire and wall-torches and table-candles twisting and eddying up into the cobwebbed recesses of the rafters.

"I give you thanks, Lord Jarl," said Swain, gravely addressing the boy, when at last he could make himself heard in the din. "But I fear you must wait a year or two before you go viking-faring. Now do you run swiftly to your bower, or the women will be coming for you and humble us in front of our brother-warriors."

III

ORPHIR STRAND was black with people, and small boats crunched through the inshore ice ferrying men and supplies to *Deathbringer* and Jarl Rognvald's longship, *Ravenfeeder*. Already Bishop William had blessed the departing crews and their vessels, bidding all remember their mission was holy in that Frakork was a confessed witch. Swain, himself, had shaken Jarl Rognvald's hand and accepted the Jarl's good wishes, with the bishop's aid, too, blasting a sudden last-minute suggestion that he should accompany the expedition. For now that it was on the point of departure its daring and novelty appealed to the underlying vein of chivalry in Rognvald's character, which prompted him to accept any dramatic appeal and in his later life sent him crusading to Jorsalaheim.*

Other chiefs and boendr gave Swain parting advice, and he was free to say good-by to his mother. A tall, stately woman, Asleif, with a calm, watchful face. She was not of those who weep; grief and death were old stories to her, and she was accustomed to suffering in silence. In her face now there was no light of exultation, only a certain confidence and faith.

"You will succeed, Swain," she said placidly.

"I will succeed or perish, mother," he answered as unemotionally.

"No, it is in my mind that you will succeed—if not this time, then another. I have prayed to the Old Gods for you, Swain. I think it is they who will aid us. This White Christ which Olaf Tryggvi's son forced upon us is no god of vengeance, whatever Bishop William may say."

Swain shrugged his shoulders.

"I have more trust in my sword than in any gods," he said. "But we shall soon know. At any rate, I have not forgotten how my father and Valthiof died."

"You would not, my son. Be vigilant and show no mercy."

They kissed each other, and Swain stamped off across the ice-hummocks to enter the boat which carried him to *Deathbringer's* side. Asleif remained where he had left her until the two longships were hull-down behind Kalfey, and that was the last any one in the Orkneys saw of Swain Olaf's son—whom many men called Asleif's son—for weeks to come. His vessels were sighted once from Dungelsbae as they steered south through Pentland Firth. Then they disappeared.

THE expedition passed east of Caithness and sailed south into the Breida Firth,† coming to land at Dufeyrar‡ in Moray, where they beached the galleys on the sandspit and covered them roughly with awnings. Swain made an arrangement with a Scots trader here to keep them in his care while he and his men went south into Atjoklar, representing that he was come from the Orkneys at the command of young Jarl Harald to serve Jarl Harald's father, Jarl Maddad, who dwelt at the castle of Atjokl; and as the Scots well knew the relationship, which existed between Swain and Jarl Harald—who regarded Swain in light of his foster-father, so that men sometimes called Swain Fostri—there was no great surprize at his coming, and people were sent with him to smooth his way and avert any conflict with the Scots.

So at last, close to the beginning of Yule, Swain reached the castle of Atjokl with one hundred and ninety men. Jarl Maddad and his wife, the Lady Margaret—who had been own sister to that Jarl Paul of the Orkneys whom Swain had kidnaped and thrown into a monastery, in order to make way for her son, the little Jarl Harald—received him with mixed feelings of satisfaction and apprehension. They were glad to hear of Swain's success in maintaining their son's rights to one-half the islands, and they feared his presence, because it was well known that Swain was a dangerous man to have in the vicinity. He was given to sudden actions and bitter hatreds, and when he hated and acted somebody else was bound to suffer. They had no feeling of concern for poor Jarl Paul, of course. He had refused their son his rights, and they and Swain—they exaggerated their share in the exploit—had made away with him, which was as it should have been.

"You carry a large train of housecarls with you, Swain," commented Jarl Maddad, after they had welcomed him and he was sitting with them at the high table in the castle hall. "You must have increased your wealth very considerably."

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*Jerusalem.

†Moray Firth. ‡Burghead.

The Jarl was a man of medium size, sly in the face. His wife, the Lady Margaret, caught up his words.

"It is no more than natural that Swain should prosper," she remarked, "seeing that he has become the guardian of our son, and must therefore be almost as great a man as Jarl Rognvald, himself, in the islands."

Swain laughed as he stared insolently into her ripely handsome, haughty features. Of Norse stock, she towered over her lord.

"I was wealthy before the youngling came to Orphir, and I have had no need to pouch his revenues since," he answered. "All the world is my purse. If your Atjoklar was but richer you would see me oftener."

"No harm was intended," said Jarl Maddad hastily.

He had no desire to see viking bands ravaging in his villages.

"But you must have a reason for traveling with so many men," insisted the Lady Margaret.

"I have discovered where Frakork hides and works her witchcraft," he replied; "and I go to burn her in her lair."

Jarl Maddad crossed himself. Margaret looked doubtful.

"She is not hereabouts?" she inquired.

"She is in the mountains south of Sudrland."

"Ah, then she is not near enough to work us any harm," said Margaret complacently.

Swain grinned.

"She is near enough to work a spell upon you. How would you like to have your hair drop off?"

This time the Lady Margaret crossed herself.

"But she has not," she exclaimed, quickly bethinking her that she feared for nothing definite.

"She will as soon as she knows you have entertained me," declared Swain.

The woman beside him turned from white to green in hue. Vanity was her chief weakness.

"She could not! She could not!" she clamored.

"Do you watch, and see," rejoined Swain.

"Oh, it is too bad! Why did you come here? I believe you have done it purposely for some evil grudge."

Swain grinned again.

"If you will help me a little, I will prevent her from working the curse," he said.

"How can you?" she cried.

"The Church—" began Jarl Maddad.

But Swain cut him off.

"I have brought these men with me so that I can wipe out her foul nest. But it is a difficult journey over your border mountains to where her steading is hid, high up on Hjalmundale's river, and I require guides to find it. Provide them for me, and you need have no fear of Frakork's witchcraft."

"Yes, that would be best," said Margaret.

"I am not so sure," objected the Jarl. "It is no concern of ours, after all, and if——"

Swain stooped his face until it was at the level of Jarl Maddad's shifty eyes.

"Is it no concern of yours?" he asked softly. "How long would young Jarl Harald last at Orphir if I worked against him? Do you think Jarl Rognvald would be loath to abandon the division of his jarldom?"

"But you would not?" cried Margaret. "You fear to let Rognvald have too much power."

"As for that," returned Swain, "I happen to have in mind another claimant upon the jarldom I can employ at need."

"You shall have the guides," promised Jarl Maddad quickly.

"Yes, yes," added the Lady Margaret. "We were jesting, Swain. We wished to see if you were as stout-hearted as ever. Ha, ha! But you are."

"I am," agreed Swain grimly. "And I will have you see to it also that no word of my purpose escapes. If I am betrayed, I shall——"

He left the sentence unfinished, and Jarl Maddad shuddered. Margaret only glowered.

"If it were not for my son," she muttered.

"Ah," rumbled Swain. "But then I should not be here."

IV

A WEEK'S journey north of Atjoklar Swain and his viking-farers were set upon by the wild people of the mountains, huge, half-naked men, their bodies and faces covered with long red hair, their scanty clothing of beasts' skins or crudely woven wool. The Orkney-folk were traversing a narrow defile, climbing with effort over icy rocks and drifts of snow, when a storm of spears assailed them from a height and they had barely time to form a shield-ring before the Redbeards were on them. The Atjoklar men whom Jarl Maddad had sent for guides shouted that they must retreat, but Swain sternly swore that he could cut down him who repeated the advice.

"We will teach our foes to fear us at the beginning of our acquaintance," he said. "Afterward perhaps they will let us alone."

Ten of his men died to carry out the lesson, but, as he had foreseen, a few minutes of hand-to-hand fighting convinced the Redbeards that they stood no chance against the big shields and mail-shirts and helms and heavy swords and axes of the viking-farers, with their ordered discipline. Shouting curses in guttural, nasal voices, the mountaineers drew off, to swirl half-heartedly around the shield-ring, making spasmodic efforts to resume the attack, but always failing to come to blows.

Swain would not suffer his men to butcher the enemies' wounded, instead explaining by means of the guides to those who could walk that his party were intending to pass this country without doing harm to its inhabitants, if they were left in peace, and with this word he sent them to their leaders, and formed his camp for the night on the scene of the encounter. To keep themselves warm the Orkney-folk reared a cairn above their dead, for in that high place the sweep of the wind and the chill of the snow-banks made sleep impossible.

In the morning a chief of the Redbeards, who called himself MacCollum, ventured within earshot of their position, and shouted harshly that they might go on without fear if they kept their promise not to despoil the country.

"But see to it that you do not return this way," he added savagely. "We know what happens when the Norsemen come into a strange land."

Swain smiled dourly.

"Do you tell him we will pass as we choose," he said to the guide who was interpreter between them. "I would fight them until they were all slain, except that I may need every sword against Frakork."

The guide prudently reduced the temper of Swain's threat, and the expedition continued unhindered, although on every height and crag for two days after they saw the flashing steel and scowling faces of the hairy mountain-folk. They feared treachery, and were continually on their guard, day and night, so that no more than half of them lay down to sleep at once, and they made their camps in defensible nooks. But on the third day they bade good-by to the Redbeards, and entered a country of dark forests and enormous mountains so desolate that even the wild people did not venture into it.

Here they saw the tall-antlered reindeer, which some of them had hunted in Caithness, and which was making its last stand in these Scots wildernesses. They met many red deer, and at night as they huddled around their fires they heard the shrill, swelling chorus of the wolf-packs racing their quarry across the hills. Bear-tracks were frequent, and the streams and lakes were populated with otters and voles. But nowhere did they see a human face or the far-off smoke of a mountain village or find so much as a broken weapon or a cast-off garment to indicate that men had been here before them. There were no paths for them to follow, and their guides were forced to travel by the stars and certain landmarks which the oldest of them had observed when he had once penetrated the ultimate north with a party dispatched by the Scots king to collect tribute where it was never offered willingly.

Late on the sixth day they sighted a plume of smoke on the horizon's rim and the guides assured them they must be approaching the vale down which Hjalmundale's river dashed toward the sea; and in order that they might run no risk of being spied upon they hid until dark within the confines of a wooded glen. Here again the Atjoklar men were for temerity; they would have scouted the land ahead, in preparation for the final advance. But Swain brushed their arguments aside.

"I have waited long enough for this night," he said fiercely. "I tell you I care not how many they be beyond those hills."

When the frosty stars were out he led the long files of the viking-farers from the wood, and they continued northward, crossing a frozen lake on the ice and scaling two intervening mountain bulks. The dawn was already at hand when they came to the foot of a third ridge behind which the smoke curled high in the early windless air that was yet sharp with the chill cold. Very faintly in that morning stillness they heard, too, the barking of a dog, sure sign that men were near.

Up the ridge swarmed Swain and his men, stumbling on the smooth rocks and ice, pulling themselves by tree-roots, wading through snow-banks in the hollows, scaling one precipice by crawling over one another's backs and hoisting the rear men with a rope of belts. By mid-morning they had won to the top, and only the straggly trees which crowned it concealed them from Hjalmundale.

Swain's instinct was to charge forward, but he saw that his followers were exhausted and he made them lie in the snow and eat their slender fare of cold venison. Meantime the dogs of the steading were barking with redoubled violence, scenting the strangers out of reach of the eyes of the watchmen who looked to the north and east; and so loud became the uproar that Swain was worried. He stirred up his men, and they crawled cautiously through snow and brush to the opposite slope. Frakork's lair lay below them.

A pleasant valley was ringed by the barren mountains; midway a river foamed too rapidly for ice to form. A skalli of stones and timber stood on the nearer bank and around it a group of barns and outbuildings. Fields were outlined under the snow. Cattle and horses moved in the yard. Men and women hurried about their duties. Straight beneath the viking-farers the stead dogs were lifting their muzzles in a denunciation which drew puzzled glances from an occasional housecarl or serving-man. It was plain that Frakork's people had no thought of danger from that quarter.

Swain drew a great breath of satisfaction, and unsheathed his sword.

"Now we shall make a vengeance men will talk of in our children's time," he said. "Swords out! Go quietly."

"Ho!" exclaimed his brother Gunni. "I can smell a burning roof-tree!"

"I see that river running red," said Osbiorn Frim's son.

"There is rich plunder down there," said a third man.

Swain plunged into the sparse tree-growth that clothed this side of the mountain, a gentler, easier slope than the one they had ascended.

"Plunder for all," he called back encouragingly.

Men bared their teeth with a hiss of expectant greed. Eyes flared lustfully. There was a soft, musical tinkle of mail, the creaking of shield-straps, a slurring of the breaking snow-crust as the long line advanced. The invaders stretched out along the mountain's flank; the trees protected their flitting progress.

The dogs barked louder and louder, but nobody observed Swain's band until they burst from the thinning trees upon the lower slopes. Then the blast of a ludr-horn was taken up and carried along the valley. The people working about the steading stopped in their tracks and looked to see what was happening. Women made for the skalli; men snatched up their weapons and ran to meet the strangers. Horses were caught and saddled. Shouts echoed obscurely, and the shrill blasts of the ludr-horns overrode the excitement.

Frakork's people rallied with entire confidence, for most of them supposed that they had to confront nothing more serious than a raid of the Redbeards, driven desperate by hunger; and some sixty men formed a hasty shield-wall behind a short, immensely broad man, whose black beard and swart features showed conspicuously against the dazzling white background of the snow.

Swain halted abruptly as this man appeared.

"Ho," he roared, "there is Olvir Rosta. He is a good warrior. Close up, men. Shield to shield!"

And the viking-farers ordered their array, so that they presented a solid front, shield lapping shield, with reversed flanks at either extremity of the line to guard against assault upon the rear. In the center of the line was Swain; Gunni was upon the right end and Osbiorn on the left. They tramped forward silently across a field and a frozen brook until they were within a long spear-cast of the line of the Hjalmundale men, who had eyed them with increasing surprize as they drew nearer. Here Swain halted them, and stepped forward alone.

"Come out, Olvir Rosta, and prove your name," he shouted. "Let us see if men call you Roysterer in vain! Come out, I say, and let me have a look at you before you die."

Olvir shoved out between the shields of his men; his face was livid with repressed passion.

"You have done an ill deed, Swain," he snarled.

"It is likely to turn out ill for you," Swain agreed. "As well as for the witch, your grandmother."

"You can not harm us," Olvir boasted. "She will make spells which will draw the strength from your arms. All of your endeavors will come to nothing."

"Put what you say to the test," invited Swain. "Fight with me here between the shield-walls. None shall come near us, and if you slay me, by magic or otherwise, you shall go free, with all your men."

Olvir laughed mockingly.

"Yes, your men would be likely to honor such a promise! Why should I fight you there, when your death is certain if I wait a little while? Presently we shall be throwing your bodies into the river, and after a few days they will reach the sea and be cast up on the beaches of Caithness to acquaint the Orkney-folk with your doom."

From the corner of his eye Swain perceived that a steady stream of recruits flowed to augment Olvir's following. Already the opposing shield-wall had double its original frontage. But he craved above everything the satisfaction of killing Olvir, himself, and he was loath to abandon his efforts to lure his enemy into the open.

"You are afraid," he jeered. "You are not the Olvir Rosta who fought with me once upon the beach at Morkaorsbakki and again when the Valkyr's favorites strove an afternoon off Deerness and the longships crashed together with splintering oars. Men will say that you feared Swain Olaf's son. Why, Olvir? Do you believe the gods have cursed you since you burned my father and Valthiof? Well you may, for it is said that there will be another burning today, yes, a red burning, with the wails of women and sword-blades hissing for the souls of heroes dying. Come!"

Olvir suddenly turned and barked a single command. His shield-wall folded in upon itself, becoming a dense column, and pelted forward at a run, a moving spear-head, with Olvir for its tip, aimed to strike the middle of Swain's extended line and split it asunder.

Swain grasped his enemy's strategy too tardily to accomplish more than emergency measures to meet it. His wings, too, folded inward, but in considerable confusion, and he urged the inchoate mass of the viking-farers to a trot, in order that they might be able to diminish the impetus of Olvir's blow. Himself, he remained outside the shield-wall, hoping that so he might have opportunity to match swords with Olvir. But Olvir was a leader of nimble wits, who had been schooled in all manner of tricks by his grandmother, as clever a warrior, scalds have sung, as any man of her time.

A dozen paces from Swain he altered his direction to the left, and his spear-head of men turned after him. Swain was thrown upon its flank, helpless to do more than hew at the outer rank of house-carls, with such of his own men as came up in time, while the mass of Olvir's attack struck with hammer-force a shearing blow that lopped off the whole left flank of the viking-farers' line and scattered the snow with lifeless bodies.

That was a cruel stroke. At one move Olvir had seized the advantage from Swain. His inferior band, with small losses, had cut the viking-farers in two sections, and methodically set to work to butcher the smaller one. But Swain did not stay idle. He gathered the balance of his people, and drove into the flank of Olvir's column so mightily as to split it to pieces in its turn, and the field became a tangled mêlée of isolated groups and companies of men. For a brief space Olvir maintained the fight with a diminishing force, but when Swain had mustered his entire strength and undertook to weave a ring about the Hjalmundale men, the fight went out of Frakork's people and they and their leader fled with shielded backs to gain the shelter of the skalli and its outbuildings.

In the stead yard there was a second interval of confused carnage. Again little groups of men contended, singly and by twos and threes. For a few minutes the Hjalmundale men held the line of a shallow stone fence and a barn, but Swain's superior numbers brushed them aside, and Swain, leading a fiery charge, had a brief vision of Olvir leaping through the skalli door.

He was collecting torch-wood to set the roof alight when a cry was raised; there were men and horses behind the skalli, and running that way he discovered Olvir and several others mounted and Frakork in the act of climbing into a saddle. Swain made for them with a bellow of rage.

"Forward, men!" he shouted. "Forward, all men! A farm to the man who stays Olvir! My Dungelsbae lands if you stop Frakork!"

A dozen of the viking-farers sprang for Olvir and his men, but Swain himself was the means of staying Frakork. In desperation and for want of any missile weapon, he cast his sword at her, and its point, striking her horse in the rump, caused the beast to rear and break away. Frakork was thrown to the ground, but regained her feet and slipped back into the skalli before Swain could reach her. He hurled himself upon the door she had entered as the bars dropped across it.

"At any rate," he muttered, turning away, "the witch is housed."

He expected to see Olvir at bay, likewise, but in the time required by his pursuit of Frakork, her grandson had brushed aside the panting opposition of the viking-farers, and was now safe out of their reach, galloping down the valley, Frakork's riderless horse at the heels of his little troop.

"Horses! Find more horses!" ordered Swain.

And he and his men searched feverishly steading and near-by farms without success. Olvir and other fugitives had carried away all the beasts in the valley.

"He can not ride far in this country in Winter," said Gunni, wiping a bloody sword with a handful of snow. "Let me go after him."

Swain considered.

"Yes, do so," he decided at length. "Follow him, if you must, to the sea. I have business to do here with Frakork. When that is attended to, the rest of us will come after you."

Gunni selected ten of the viking-farers who were comparatively fresh, and stopping only to fill their pouches with food from a near-by farm kitchen, they set out to follow the horses' tracks in the snow. Swain returned to the skalli, and put his men to gathering torchwood; but he was annoyed to learn that they were all fearful of approaching close to its walls.

"What is the trouble?" he demanded. "There are no men inside."

"The witch is making spells," answered Osbiorn Grim's son, who was bleeding from a stiff cut in the shoulder.

"They will do nobody any harm," returned Swain. "She tried once to bewitch me, and could not."

"Nevertheless," insisted Osbiorn stubbornly, "she is singing in there, and it makes my bowels turn into water to hear her."

"Will you let a woman fright you?" snapped Swain.

"Go, yourself, and listen to her," said Osbiorn.

"Yes, Swain, go yourself," spoke up several more of the older men.

"I would not go near to that skalli for all the gold in Jarl Maddad's coffers," declared one of the Atjoklar men, who had been in the rear during the fighting. "She has an evil name, that Frakork. Men say she can wither your limbs or charm the spirit from your body and replace it with a demon."

The sturdy viking-farers, spattered with their enemies' blood, leaning on their nicked shields and soiled blades, shuddered at such words, and glanced fearfully at the shuttered walls of the skalli.

Swain snorted in derision.

"There is only an old woman—and maybe some more like her," he said. "I will go in and drag her out myself. You shall see her die."

Osbiorn crossed himself.

"Have a care, Swain," he urged. "We can bring up the faggots as near as her magic permits, and if——"

"I shall not need faggots," retorted Swain.

He selected an ax from a heap of weapons on the ground, and strode up to the skalil door.

V

THE skalli was quiet as Swain approached it. A curl of smoke rose from the chimney-hole in the roof. Otherwise there was no evidence that it had been occupied.

Swain raised the ax high above his head and drove the keen blade to the haft in the door-planks hard by the bolts of a hinge. Chips rained to the ground; the crash of the blow resounded over the valley. He hesitated, lifted the ax again and was poised for a second blow when a cool voice spoke to him from the opposite side of the barrier, so close, indeed, that involuntarily he leaped back, fearful of some trickery.

"You waste your strength, Swain. Save it for this old body that may yet spoil your splendid youth."

Insolent, bodyless, with a chill intonation that conveyed a feeling of passionless hatred and knowledge of unspeakable horrors, that voice was the audible significance of Frakork Maddan's daughter, whose witchcraft and wizardry had made her name a byword all through the North. Men feared her—and served her; feared her and fought her—and died. Her life was a sinister tapestry of wickedness.

Swain recovered himself, with a burst of anger for having quailed in front of his men, and again he buried his ax-blade in the door-planks. The whole wall of the skalli quivered under the blow.

"You waste threats, witch," he growled. "Save breath for your death-speech."

A laugh, as coldly mirthless as the trickle of the valley's river, was her answer.

"The door is unbarred," she called. "Come, Swain, and make an end of me—or yourself. Come, and I will tell you how your father, Olaf, and Valthiof died when Olvir burned Dungelsbae skalli and I stood by and watched."

Swain wrenched his ax free, and pulled at the door-latch. It gave readily, and swung open toward him.

"Show yourself, witch," he commanded.

But this time her answering laughter came remotely from the skalli's interior. Swain, standing on the door-step, peered in upon a darkened antechamber, littered with ale-barrels and planks and rests for the long tables which were set up when the housecarls ate in the hall.

"I am here, Swain," she hailed him mockingly.

Swain set his foot over the threshold as Osbiorn shouted to him from the uneasy group of viking-farers who had watched his assault upon the door.

"She will trick you, Swain! Come out, and let us try her witchcraft with fire."

"No, we will burn her in the open," replied Swain. "Make ready the faggots. I will fetch her forth."

He made certain the antechamber was unoccupied, and crossed it rapidly to an opposite doorway, draped with a leather curtain. This he pushed aside with his ax, lest some one lurked behind it to stab him through its folds; but his precaution was unnecessary. He looked through this inner doorway to the hall of the skalli, the usual long, lofty room, open to the roof-beams, the floor of beaten earth, the walls lined with benches, except on the south side where was the high table. Here stood Frakork, one hand resting upon the table, which was cluttered with weapons and serving-dishes and a dish-lamp burning with a bright, steady flame.

The lamp and the sunlight which streamed through the chimney-hole in the roof illumined the hall sufficiently so that Swain could see Frakork clearly.

The witch-woman looked no different from when he had seen her last. Her tall figure in its clinging robes of black velvet cloth, her full, unlined face, defied the years she had lived; and Swain could not repress another shudder as he recalled the tales of the foul practises by which she was reputed to have retained her physical vigor at an age when other women were bent and worn and content to huddle by a warm fire.

Her green eyes glowed with the icy radiance which gave them their uncanny power. She watched him with an appearance of amused indifference, which yet was void of humor, instinct rather with incarnate wickedness and overknowledge of nameless things beyond all law and reason.

"You have more craft than I credited you with, Swain," she said in her placid voice. "It was well thought of to come down upon us from Scotland's side."

Swain was conscious of a feeling of bitter cold, as if an Iceland wind was shriveling his soul.

"This is no time for talk," he muttered, and clutched tighter at his ax-helve.

Her green eyes dwelt upon his, and he felt now a numbing power fastening upon his wits.

"No time for talk!" she repeated, jeering him without stressing a syllable. "Yes, it is a time for action, for the consummation of another step in the vengeance I have planned against your house. Olaf and Valthiof are dead. You will die in a few moments—very horribly, Swain; your carls outside will be of no avail to aid you. Then I think Gunni will die as he blunders homeward. And after I shall come to Asleif, myself. Some one must tell her of her sons' ends. Why not I?"

The cold sensation communicated itself to Swain's eyelids. They became rigid. He tried to open his mouth, and could not. He made to raise his ax, and it weighted his arm down. The hall dwindled before him. Frakork melted to a bust, a head, a pair of green eyes that blazed with chilling fire.

Frakork's hateful voice went on, monotonously level, implacable.

"Yes, why not I? I am a woman, Swain, if I am a witch, as you and others say. A malign charge! I, a witch, indeed! Why, what power have I? What harm could my old body do to you at this moment? It is ridiculous! So, as a woman, it will be my duty to go to Asleif, and tell her of her grief. 'Swain died thus and so. Oh, bravely, Aslief, bravely as the ox that grunts when it feels the knife in its throat! And Gunni was sprawled upon a hillside, with a stake in his entrails. He called upon you at the last! He cried that his God had abandoned him.'

"And then, Swain, I think she will weep. And I shall embrace her gently, as an old woman should, and whisper in her ear things which will rive her brain from its pan and tear her heart into fine-spun scarlet shreds, blackening and besmearing her soul and riving her wits into sundered madness. What think you of that, Swain?"

A shout came from the stead yard, Osbiorn's voice, scarce dulled by the skalli walls.

"Ho, Swain! Call to us if you live."

It smote upon Swain's dulling consciousness like the edge of the ax he still grasped in his right hand, prying a wedge between him and the evil influence which flooded from Frakork's green eyes.

By an effort so tremendous that it brought a groan to his lips he wrenched his gaze from her face, and strove to answer—

"I live!"

He did not know the voice for his own, quavering, shrill, uncertain; but it stirred him to renewed energy. He realized that he had been in Frakork's power to an extent which infuriated him, and he brought all his will to bear to withstand the numbing shock of her eyes. Gradually, as he stared across the hall, the full, oval face took shape in the lamp-light, the black-robed figure reappeared.

The green eyes blinked as if they, too, had been released from a burden of effort.

"How do you like my magic, Swain?" purred Frakork.

Swain mustered a laugh that rang forced and hollow.

"I have broken your magic and now I shall break you," he answered, and raised the ax above his head to strike.

But as he put his foot forward Frakork stooped above the high table and emptied a packet of powder upon the flame of the lamp. There was a flash and a noise such as the sea makes when it pours over the lip of a rock-cavern. A dense, greenish smoke, pungent, eye-biting, billowed upward and started to settle in an impervious blanket upon the chamber.

"I have more magic, Swain," mocked Frakork's voice from the heart of the smoke-cloud.

Awed despite himself, Swain dared not charge into it. He had a dim vision of the witch twenty feet distant, and he flung his ax at her with a baffled snarl. He heard a thud as it struck the table, then a cool laugh from Frakork and there was a whisper beside him. He reached out his hand—and touched a spear that quivered in the door-post at his left. Another whisper. The leathern curtain behind him was ripped by a second spear. The air seemed to be filled with whispering voices; a knife, point-first, sped down from overhead and was shattered on his helm.

Swain dropped to his hands and knees, and crawled into the antechamber. The ax he had flung sang over his head as he saw daylight through the dissolving haze of the smoke. He stumbled to the door, fell out and banged it after him. Osbiorn and a dozen others ran to aid him, eyes popping in their bearded faces.

"Has she spelled you, Swain?" "Can you speak?" "Are you whole in your body?" "Are your wits with you?"

Swain found his feet and waved them all to silence.

"We will burn her," he said grimly. "Yes, she would have put a spell upon me. But for Osbiorn's call she would have succeeded. She has stronger magic than I thought. But any witch will burn in fire.

Bishop William has told me so. Carry those faggots up to the wall. No, no, be not so fearful, fools. If I went in to her, and came forth alive, you can venture so far as the skalli wall."

They heaped the fat wood against the windward side of the skalli until it was man-high, and then set it alight, compassing the building meanwhile with a mailed circle. The flames spread rapidly, for all the snow piled on the eaves, and the younger men amused themselves by attempting to toss lighted torches in through the chimney-hole. Swain, having recovered his sword from the rear of the building, came and stood gloomily over against the front entrance. He had no feeling of exultation such as he had anticipated. He began to wonder if he should be successful, after all. He was disposed to believe Frakork might yet escape them by some device of black magic beyond their power to prevent. But as the roof caught in earnest and the flames spread across the kitchen end, feeding upon the dried hams that hung from the rafters, his spirits brightened, his confidence was restored. No thing with life in it could long exist in that inferno of fire.

So Frakork decided. While Swain watched, the door was opened and the witch appeared. Sparks from the roof had burned holes in the rich fabric of her dress; her face was streaked with soot. But her green eyes blazed with the same undiminished malignancy, cold as the fires that rage in the heart of a great diamond which men die for and women ruin themselves to possess.

Swain started toward her, sword in hand; but he stopped when she spoke.

"It is no use, Swain. I shall save you the trouble. I choose to die by my own act, if die I must. But do not think that this is the end of the tale. There is more to come, much more. I have seen Gunni dead, and Asleif dead; and at the far end of all I think you, too, will die with victory in your grasp. The riches you win and the honors you gain shall taste sour in your mouth; and all your life Olvir shall be a marsh-light dancing ahead of you to divert you from the greatness you otherwise might win. When you are dead men will say of you, 'He was Swain Olaf's son, who might have been a Jarl; but he spent his days pursuing a feud and his wealth in exacting vengeance.'"

She raised a phial to her lips, and tipped back her head.

"It is over, Swain," she cried. "And it will do you little good."

And before he could answer her, she had turned upon her heel and gone back into the skalli, closing the door behind her. Afterward some of the viking-farers claimed that they had heard a voice that was unearthly in its beauty singing above the roar of the flames. But what is certain is that a few minutes later the roof fell in, and the next day when the ashes had cooled they did not find so much as a charred bone to indicate how Frakork had died.

Because of this the claim was made and repeated in after years that Frakork had magicked herself away from the skalli and cheated the flames. Yet no man ever saw her again; and Olvir Rosta, who had been a leader of wealth and influence so long as he had her to advise him, became a rover and a trouble-maker wandering from place to place, earning a living by his sword and the craftiness of his wit, which was sufficient in its way, but by no means equal to Frakork's.

He escaped Gunni, it is true, by abandoning his horses in a pass of the Sudrland mountains and doubling upon the track he had followed, so coming down upon the shores of Scotland's Firth, where he took boat for the Sudreyar, and after a Winter in hiding went north to Iceland. But he was never after a man of lands; he reckoned his estate in longships, and he had the specter of Swain's vengeance always at his elbow—as, indeed, Swain also had Olvir's vengeance mouthing over his shoulder wherever he went.

Men made a saying of it:

Olvir's roasting,
Swain's burning,
Bring the ravens
Oft-returning.

And it is to be said that more men died through this feud and its consequences than through any other cause that was ever known in the North. But at that time Swain recked little of it. He gained much honor from his march through Scotland, and the King of Scots sent for him and invited him to curb the Redbeards who wreaked havoc with the settled parts of the kingdom. Jarl Rognvald also listened to him with increased respect, and he earned popularity by dividing the spoils of the raid among his followers without claiming any share himself.

Only Aslief, his mother, gave him small praise. When he came to her skalli on Gairsey she kissed him, according to her wont, but said nothing, and Swain, who regarded her alone among women, was very humble.

"I did what I might, mother," he said.

"You did all that a man could," she answered. "But I think it would have been better if you had failed rather than achieved a half-measure of success. However, you must continue as you have begun, for your father and Valthiof will not rest easy wherever they are until Olvir is slain."

"Long years or short years, come good luck or bad, I will slay him," promised Swain.

THE BLIND TRAMP

by H. Campbell Buckley

FOG.

Not a sound save the murmur of the bow-wash and the distant throb of the engines, drowned, each minute by the hoarse blare of the steam-whistle—our only means of feeling our way along in safety.

We are a tramp steamer, plugging across the Atlantic at a tramp's speed—eight knots an hour. For three days, since the fog set in, the captain has not slept. He stands, in dripping oil-skins, on the bridge—listening—always listening.

We are crossing the Great Bank of Newfoundland; and, besides the chance of running foul of a fleet of cod-fishers, we are dead in the track of the great Atlantic liners. And our vision is limited to two hundred feet.

No conversation passes between the captain and the officer of the watch. Both are fully occupied, listening for the warning blasts of other craft.

The wireless operator comes swiftly to the bridge.

"Vessel close by, sir. Wireless working continuous-wave, and I can't get his signals; but I can hear his motor, and he must be close by."

The captain turns to the officer of the watch.

"Keep that whistle going oftener, mister," he snaps. His nerves are on edge—little wonder, after seventy hours' sleepless watch and strain.

From somewhere astern, like an echo of our own siren, comes faintly an answering signal. The men on the bridge cease breathing to listen.

"Port quarter, sir," says the officer of the watch.

Our whistle blares again. Comes the answer—deafeningly now; and a huge liner, looming gigantic in the murk, is upon us!

"Hard-a-port!"

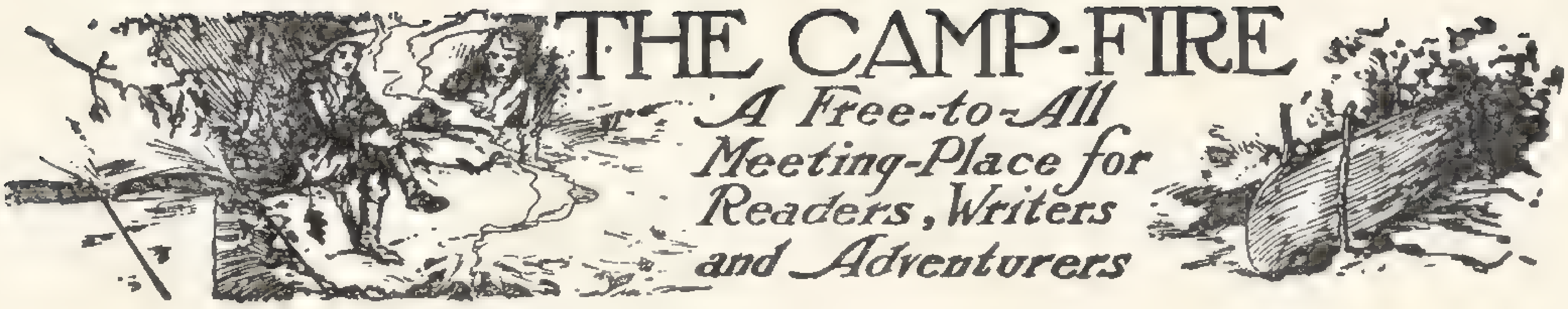
With a rattle of chains, our helm is flung over. The liner, seeing us, has gone hard-a-starboard. For a few tense seconds, the issue is in doubt. The women passengers on the liner are screaming in the fog; the men are shouting; one drunkard in the Circassian-walnut smoking room is trying to start three cheers—

The ships pay off, in answer to their helms. The leviathan, towering above us, rushes past, fifty feet away, to disappear in the fog like a ghost into a solid wall.

We steady on our course again.

The captain draws a long, cold breath through his teeth. He feels like thanking God, but he is out of the habit.

"Keep that —— whistle going, mister!" is all he says.



THE CAMP-FIRE

A Free-to-All Meeting-Place for Readers, Writers and Adventurers

Our Camp-Fire came into being May 5, 1912, with our June issue, and since then its fire has never died down. Many have gathered about it and they are of all classes and degrees, high and low, rich and poor, adventurers and stay-at-homes, and from all parts of the earth. Some whose voices we used to know have taken the Long Trail and are heard no more, but they are still memories among us, and new voices are heard, and welcomed.

We are drawn together by a common liking for the strong, clean things of out-of-doors, for word from the earth's far places, for man in action instead of caged by circumstance. The *spirit* of adventure lives in all men; the rest is chance.

But something besides a common interest holds us together. Somehow a real comradeship has grown up among us. Men can not thus meet and talk together without growing into friendlier relations; many a time does one of us come to the rest for facts and guidance; many a close personal friendship has our Camp-Fire built up between two men who had never met; often has it proved an open sesame between strangers in a far land.

Perhaps our Camp-Fire is even a little more. Perhaps it is a bit of leaven working gently among those of different station toward the fuller and more human understanding and sympathy that will some day bring to man the real democracy and brotherhood he seeks. Few indeed are the agencies that bring together on a friendly footing so many and such great extremes as here. And we are numbered by the hundred thousand now.

If you are come to our Camp-Fire for the first time and find you like the things we like, join us and find yourself very welcome. There is no obligation except ordinary manliness, no forms or ceremonies, no dues, no officers, no anything except men and women gathered for interest and friendliness. Your desire to join makes you a member.

SOMETHING from A. D. H. Smith about the central figure in his story in this issue.

Brooklyn, N. Y.

Swain was a real man, although I have taken some liberties with his true life-story, which is set forth with much gusto and quite as much emphasis as I have used in "The Orkneyinga Saga," the remarkable and little-known chronicle of the Orkneys under the Norse Jarls who were a potent factor in that part of the world for several hundred years and whose colonists have left an abiding impress upon modern Scotland beyond the Highland Line.

For three centuries and a half this Saga is the principal authority for the history of Northern Scotland, and it hooks up also with such works as the Flateyjarbok, the Fagrskinna and the Sagas of Olaf Tryggvi's son and Olaf the Holy, parts of it being incorporated in all of these. Originally, it is believed, it was called the Jarla Saga, or Saga of the Earls, and there is proof that it was known in Iceland as early as the first half of the Thirteenth Century. Snorri Sturluson, who composed the Olaf Saga, used some of it, and Snorri died in 1241.

The original form of the Orkneyinga Saga is no longer in existence; no manuscripts have come down to us. It has been collated, probably in incomplete form, from the quotations from it cited in other Sagas, and it is evident from the liberality of these quotations that the Norse skalds held it in high esteem. Certainly, it yields to none of the better-known Sagas in wealth of action, moving simplicity of description and rich human interest. There is no fine writing in it, but every character is a living, breathing man or woman.

NOT only Swain lived, but most of the other principal characters, Olvir Rosta, Frakork, the Jarls and Swain's father and mother and brothers. And in later stories about Swain you will meet other men and women of his times, with whom he fought or schemed or intrigued. He was a very redoubtable person. Of his final end the Saga speaks in these words:

"Here is the end of Swain's history; and it has been said that he was the greatest man in the Western—" that is, the Norse colonies of the islands—"lands, either in old times or at the present day, of those who had not a higher title than he had."

Anybody who knows the old Saga makers knows that was high praise from one of them. But Swain was more than a lusty sea-rover and rough politician. He typified a period, and the liberties I have taken with him, and to which I referred above, are based solely upon a desire to make clearer the brave race he stands for.

And lest you may be tempted to adopt the view some modern critics assume, that the old Sagas were largely imaginary accounts composed to flatter the vanity of Kings and Jarls, let me quote from the statement of that Snorri Sturluson I have already mentioned. He is speaking of the songs of the skalds who accompanied Harald Harfagri (Fairhaired) in his wars and expeditions:

"These songs which were sung in the presence of Kings and chiefs, or their sons, are the materials of our history; what they tell of their deeds and battles we take for truth; for though the skalds did no doubt praise those in whose presence they stood, yet no one would dare to relate to a chief what he and those who heard it knew to be wholly imaginary or false, as that would not be praise but mockery."

THE Norse Jarls held the Orkneys and Shetlands from the time of Siguard, the first Jarl, who died A. D. 874, to Jarl John, a son of Jarl Harald Maddad's son, who was a great friend—and once, an enemy—of Swain and will figure in a later story. Jarl John died in 1231, leaving no son, and the earldom passed through a daughter of his who married Gilbride, Earl of Angus, to their son, Magnus. Six Angus Jarls followed him, each of them more Scots than his predecessor, and gradually the ties that bound the islands to Norway weakened. In 1320 Magnus V died, and again for lack of a male heir the earldom passed through his daughter Isabella, who married Malise, Earl of Stratherne. A son of Malise, of the same name, succeeded him in the three earldoms of Stratherne, Orkney and Caithness, but this second Malise complicated matters a third time by failing to leave a male heir, and the Orkney earldom, after his death, about 1350, passed through his daughter Elizabeth to Henry St. Clair, who was confirmed Earl in 1379.

There were several more or less nebulous Norse claimants in the intervening twenty or thirty years. The St. Clair family held the Orkney earldom until Earl William exchanged it with the Scots Crown for other lands and titles in 1471, and in the same year, the islands were annexed to Scotland by Act of Parliament in consequence of the failure of Norway to pay the full dowry of James III's Queen Margaret.—A. D. H. SMITH.

WRITE *Field and Stream*, 25 West 45th Street, New York City, for as many copies of their free pamphlet "Pistol Protection vs. Pistol Prohibition" as you think you can use to advantage in combatting the foolish and vicious anti-weapon laws now being urged upon the people of this country. *Field and Stream* is conducting an organized campaign to defeat these proposed laws and to substitute a uniform law endorsed by the International Ass'n of Chiefs of Police leading criminologists, the U. S. Revolve Ass'n (14 West 48th Street New York City), etc. Make your efforts count by concentrating them through *Field and Stream*.

Here is a copy of the pamphlet issued by that magazine:

Pistol Protection
vs
Pistol Prohibition

WHILE you sportsmen sleep, a persistent and well-organized minority is spending thousands of dollars to legislate another of your personal liberties, another of your inherent rights, out of existence, by depriving you of a valuable and legitimate means of protecting your home and person and loved ones and a legitimate and proper means of pleasure. This minority of citizens, having reached their decision that the pistol and revolver are evil things, are determined that you shall not have them, regardless of your character, your age, your standing as a citizen, your inherent rights as such, your needs or your pleasure. And unless you do your part to prevent it, you'll actually wake up some fine morning before long and find such legislation an accomplished fact.

This is no false cry of "Wolf, wolf." There is in the United States Senate, today, a bill that would prohibit the sale or transportation of the revolver throughout the United States. It was introduced by Senator Shields of Tennessee. Many members of Congress have declared their intention of voting for this bill. Also in some *dozen* of our state legislatures there are bills introduced by well-meaning reformers that would completely prohibit the private use of the revolver in these several states; and fifteen or twenty additional states will have such bills before their legislatures next fall.

Reasons for Anti-Pistol Agitation:

ALL of the laws and all the propaganda have one alleged purpose: to stop crime by taking the revolver from the criminal. Our recent crime wave with its many robberies, murders and other acts of lawlessness, has put the general public, throughout the nation, in a mood which demands action. And so the answer of the anti-pistol people to this problem is: Pass laws prohibiting the use of the revolver and pistol so that no one can own one in the United States and there will be a 90% decrease in crime. If this were true, if it were possible by legislation to take the pistol out of the hands of the criminal class, and if by doing so we should thereby prevent violent and criminal acts, there would be no argument. The law should be immediately passed. But again we ask the anti-pistol reformers: *Would a law designed to take the gun away from the criminal work? Could it be enforced?* The answer to this question must be affirmative beyond any reasonable doubt, if we are to pass laws prohibiting the ownership of the pistol by honest and law-abiding citizens.

Will Pistol Prohibition Work?

THE answer to the above question immediately becomes apparent and obvious to any one with an atom of intelligence when he considers the following problems connected with such a law's enforcement:

1. *How would it be possible to find and confiscate the hundreds of thousands of pistols in the possession of criminals?*
2. *How could such laws prevent the smuggling in of foreign pistols to supply the demands made by the crook and the tough citizen?*
3. *What is to prevent the dishonest gunsmith or any mechanic from manufacturing pistols for the use of the criminal element?*
4. *How could any anti-pistol bill prevent a crook from buying a rifle or shotgun, sawing off the barrel, cutting the stock to the pistol grip and thereby making his own gun?*
5. *Where would the millions of dollars be raised by the State and federal Governments to employ the thousands of officials necessary even to attempt adequate enforcement of this law?*

(More taxes, could be the only answer to this question. It is certain that the people would never be willing to pay the price.)

The answers to the above five questions are obvious. No possible force of government agents, no matter how large, how efficient, and no matter if every agent were thoroughly honest, could possibly confiscate all the guns now in the hands of our criminals. Smuggling and bootlegging alone would always keep the crook plentifully supplied. In other words, there can be but one answer to the first question: *Would such legislation disarm the crook?*—and that answer is an emphatic "*No!*"

A person setting out to commit a crime is going to be armed to meet his needs. Crimes of violence occurred long before the gun or gunpowder were even dreamed of.

The whole truth of the matter is that the pistol or the revolver can not be held responsible for the criminal and his acts; in other words, the condition that has caused this anti-pistol propaganda would not be eliminated, for crime would still exist and the revolver would still be in the hands of the crook and highwayman.

The Automobile as a Criminal Asset:

THERE is a close analogy between the automobile and pistol. The automobile and the motor truck are used to commit thousands of crimes each year. In addition to this, the automobile is the instrument by which one person is killed every forty minutes in the United States. To suggest that the automobile be legislated from existence, would be silly and asinine; to demand that the revolver be forbidden to all our citizens, is as equally preposterous and absurd.

The Results of Such a Law:

(1) *It would leave the law-abiding citizen helpless and without protection before the attacks of the armed crook and highwayman.* To the resident of the outlying and sparsely settled districts, such a law would be damnable, for he has no protection other than that which he provides for himself. (2) It would be another invasion of our personal liberties. (3) It would take away healthful and valuable recreation.

The Rights of the Individual:

THIS must be seriously considered. It is a dangerous restriction of the rights and liberties of the individual American when a man living some thousand miles away in an isolated and unprotected district is told by the voters of an at least theoretically protected city, that he had not the right to keep a revolver for the protection of his family, and that if he does avail himself of the revolver's protection, he is a law-breaker and subject to prosecution. It is a serious development of paternalism and added limitation of the individual's liberty when he is forbidden by law to carry a revolver with him on a hunting or fishing trip. Americans must fight this tendency. It means that their Constitutional rights are being taken from them, in fact, if not in theory. Even though a man never carried a pistol, he should have the right to do so, to avail himself of its protection, if he so desired.

What Has Been Done to Defeat Pistol Prohibition:

REALIZING the harmful consequences and utter impracticability of such a law and knowing what a real and close at hand danger this nation and its citizens face, *Field and Stream Magazine* has been conducting an active campaign for the last six months against the proposed legislation. We have told our readers what we have just told you, and in addition, we have declared that if our present laws were properly enforced, not only those regulating the use of the pistol, but all of our criminal laws; if the murderer had immediate justice dealt him by our juries and courts, as he has in England; if the robber knew that he would serve his full sentence, we would quickly see a large decrease in crime. If we are ever to see crime abolished, we must study the conditions that *make* the crook and his kin. This is *Field and Stream's positive* stand on this matter. We realize the millennium is not here, which brings us back to the argument before us:

With America facing pistol disarmament, with some dozen or more states threatening to pass laws that either disarm the law respecting citizen or make it practically impossible to obtain a revolver for his protection, and with your knowing exactly what will result from such laws, what are you as an American sportsman and as a member of an organization of honest men, going to do about it?

This magazine has spent a great deal of money, and is prepared to spend a great deal more, to continue the fight against the anti-pistol crowd; we have interested a few other publications who are helping us carry on; we have awakened a great many sportsmen throughout the country, and as a result, these men have asked us to take further steps in this fight. We believe them right and we are trying to obey their wishes.

How Men's Clubs Can Help:

THERE are several thousand hunting and fishing clubs, Elks Lodges and other organizations of he-men throughout the country. If every one of these organizations can be made to realize the seriousness of this situation, the danger involved for the average citizen and his family, and if each of these clubs would cooperate with us in this fight, we will be able to defeat all of this proposed vicious legislation. Candidly, that is exactly the reason why we have sent this little summary of the pistol situation to you.

We want your help; for if the American citizen is to retain his own right to own and carry arms, you must help us in this fight. Your organization must see to it that it adds its strength where it will count the most in combating those who would deprive us of that right.

We believe that you can do the most good if you will pursue the following course of action: (1) Take a vote on whether or not you favor our stand in fighting to protect the right of the honest American citizen to own and bear "one-hand guns" for his protection and pleasure. (2) If the vote is favorable, appoint a capable and thoroughly interested member to take charge of your interests in this campaign and to cooperate with us in any way that he thinks will be of benefit. (3) Get in communication with other clubs in your State and tell them of your stand, and of our campaign, that they may thereby be induced to take a similar stand. (4) Send your state and national representatives copy of resolution telling them of your attitude on this matter so that they will realize there is a large and active public that does not believe in any measure that would take personal protection away from our decent, law-abiding citizens. (5) Write your local newspapers of your stand, also give them the reasons why you take such a position, and last—*vote a contribution to our campaign fund to combat anti-pistol legislation and propaganda. If it's only $25, or even less, it will help us greatly.*

This fight has already cost *Field and Stream* and its readers a lot of money, and before it is over it will cost many thousands more. Stamps, stationery, clerical help, pamphlets such as this, quickly run into big money; and if the American public is to know of our side of the argument, there will have to be hundreds of thousands of letters with educational matter sent to the voters throughout the land; otherwise, the money and the propaganda of the other side, who are well-organized and well-financed, is going to win.

We want it understood that this fight is being waged only for the rights and interests of the American citizen, and that we are in no way financially interested in this, except that we are spending our money as well as yours to carry on the fight, because we believe it right. Every cent that has been sent in and every cent that will be sent in, will be accounted for by us. The last dollar will be spent for this fight and for nothing else.

Field and Stream has no connection in any way, shape or manner with the manufacturers of revolvers or pistols. They are not supporting us in any way, shape or manner nor have they contributed a dollar to this *Field and Stream* campaign. We realize, too, that if there were any connection with those who are commercially interested, the manufacturers of the pistol, for instance, we should hurt, rather than benefit our cause.

This campaign against anti-pistol legislation must be supported and won on its merits.

Field and Stream knows that our side is right and that the logic of our case is correct. For this reason, we expect the co-operation of every he-man club in America. We must have it if we are to win. You must help, no one else will. Will some member make the motion that this club support *Field and Stream Magazine* in the five ways mentioned (the secretary will read them again)—and bring the matter to a vote *right now?*

ELTINGE F. WARNER, *Publisher*
Field and Stream,
America's Magazine for the Outdoorsman.

SOMETHING from Harold Lamb in connection with his story in this issue.

Early in the Sixteenth century there grew up, or grew together, beyond the eastern frontier of Europe, bands of plainsmen. They were men who fled from the iron mastery of the nobles of Eastern Europe; many Tatars joined them, and Turkish janisseries. Some were English and French adventurers, young for the most part. Exiled noblemen, wandering soldiers and Tatar chiefs commanded them. They were called vagabonds or masterless men, having forsaken the feudal system and the towns.

IN TIME they became masters of the southern steppe, the Ukraina, or Borderland. Roughly, this is the region from Moscow to the Caucasus. Their kingdom consisted of many thousand square miles of prairies; they had no king, choosing a head-man to administer the affairs of their brotherhood. They were of necessity unusual horsemen, hunters, craftsmen, boat builders, and sailors (when the Black Sea was to be negotiated.)

Children born to the Cossacks were plunged in brine, or exposed in the snow to harden them, and, before they could stand, were taught to ride a horse and swim the rivers in this fashion. Only the fittest could survive on the borderland. The Cossack father placed a new saber in the cradle, saying.

"Well, Cossack, this is my one gift to you; you will use it during the whole of your life, and you will die with it in your hand."

TSAR BORIS GOUDUNOV (in the beginning of the seventeenth century) saw that these tribal bands of adventurers were making a barrier that protected Russia proper from the Moslems. To strengthen the barrier he sent to the Ukraina condemned criminals and lawless men. These "bad men"— to quote the Slav chronicles—found themselves in a prison with the sky for a roof and the oceans of Asia for walls.

So began what might be called the first Foreign Legion. We hear of the work of the Cossacks as they pushed across the frozen plains of Siberia until they stood on the shores of Behring Strait many years before Lewis and Clark reached the northern Pacific from the American side; we hear of them opening caravan routes to China and India, for the Europeans, and, in their long skiffs assailing the Sultan on the Black Sea.

One of their favorite songs of today begins:

"Formerly we Cossack fellows
Sailed at home upon the sea.
Our long boats on the waters,
Took toll from Araby . . ."

Several times the Cossacks accomplished what the Allies found impossible at Gallipoli—entered the Bosphorus, and raised havoc around Constantinople, which was then (to quote an English observer of that day) the most formidable city in the whole world. These skiffs of the Cossacks were fitted with ten oars, two men to an oar, and were double ended, the rudder being hung at will for'ard or aft, so that—to quote an old chronicle—"without loss of time they may proceed with either end which happens to be foremost. Each Boat carries fifty select men armed with Fire-arms and Cimitar, in the management of which they are very expert; and are a people sober, enduring labor and hard diet, and so speedy in their Incursions that they forestall the advices and commonly strike before they threaten."

ANOTHER time, this Englishman (Paul Rycault, Consul of Smyrna 1630), relates the Grand Signior (the Sultan) was so enraged at seeing himself "braved on the very banks of his Imperial Seat and his villages and towns round about burnt and pillaged by a crew of Free Booters and Pirates" that he struck the admiral of the Turks in the face, so that "blood issued from his nose."

After the Cossacks, upon this occasion, had penetrated as far as Pompey's pillar and burned the lighthouse, the Sultan dispatched to the Emperor of Poland envoys "with Propositions very advantageous to the Crown of Poland, conditionally that the continued irruptions made by the Cossacks should be stopped, and they (the Cossacks) restrained."

We can imagine the Gargantuan laughter of the Cossacks on being called back by the Christian monarchs, just when their frolic in Constantinople was coming to a head.

AND it is amusing to come across one of their few state letters—a reply to the Sultan, who, with the usual recapitulation of his titles, had warned the Cossacks to keep within bounds. By the way, it is interesting to notice, today, what the Turks considered their domain. The Sultan writes:

"I that am Lord of Lords, and conqueror in the parts of Arabia, Persia and Greece: King exalted by divine assistance to the Empire of the Universe; the most invincible possessor of the White and Black Seas, Lord of the divine temple of Mecca, as also of Jerusalem, Aleppo, Damascus, and of all those holy and venerable countries, of Grand Cairo, Babylon, of Mosul, Ethiopa (North Africa), and Lesser Asia; of all the countries of the Armenians, Georgians and Tatars, of Moldavia and Wallachia, and the regions of Greece and Anatolia; and, in sum, Supreme Lord of the Seven Climates, the victorious and triumphant King in the service of Allah . . ."

THE reply of the Cossack chief (a little expurgated) follows. And Talbot Mundy could tell us what effect this would have on an orthodox Moslem:

"*Thou Turkish Devil.*

"Brother and Companion of Lucifer himself! Who dares to call himself Lord of the Christians—but is not! Babylonish cook! Brewer of Jerusalem! Goat-keeper of the herds of Alexandria! Swineherd of Great and Lesser Egypt! Armenian Sow and Tatar Goat! Insolent unbeliever—may the devil take you!

"The Cossacks refuse every demand and petition that you now make to them—or that you may in future invent.

"Thank us for condescending to answer you!

IVAN SIRKO,
and the Cossack troops."

It is refreshing to read this bit of diplomatic correspondence written at a time when the consuls of the European Powers were enduring every indignity at Constantinople, and making gifts of money, arms and ships to keep on the good side of the Grand Signior and the Barbary *pashas* who were just beginning to prey on the commerce of the Mediterranean. And when it was written the Cossack chief and his men had narrowly escaped being wiped out by an inroad of the Turkish *janisseries.*—HAROLD LAMB.

MOSQUITOES, dogs, wasps, and such—will they bite you or won't they? And why or why not?

Berkeley, California.

Now about being bothered or bitten, stung or sich, by insects or other things.

I am not absolutely sure of my statements from actual experiments or knowledge, but my premise is that each person has an effluvium that is either attractive or is repellant to the lower animals and insects. My own experience is that if there is a body parasite within reach, it will land on me and stay put, frequently no matter what remedy I use to prevent. Just the opposite, my wife, when living, could lie in the same bed with me and not a bug touch her while they nearly ate me up. This occurred on several occasions in hotels we visited.

Again I have seen an aunt of mine in a cloud of mosquitoes and not one light upon her or ever bite her. Nor would any other vermin that she knew of. Never was bothered by 'em.

Another case. I can approach and handle any dog I ever saw and some that even their owners could not handle. Some so savage that no one else was ever known to even approach them without them trying to break loose. When I go near them I stand near enough if they are caged or chained, for them to smell me. I stand quiet and in a few minutes the worst subside and though they don't always wag their tails, I know I am accepted by them. Just why I don't know, but I can touch them then. I have petted some of the wolves and coyotes in the Bronx Zoo and in the Phila. Zoo, too. I can also do the same with most of the cats (so can my daughters), big and small. Surprized a guard once in the Bronx by stroking a black puma that muzzled up to the bars at me. Don't know just why I can do this. Don't take any special credit to myself for it, it just happens so. My grandmother, mother and daughters also have or had the same faculty—I saw guinea pigs tumbling over each other in a cage at Gypsy John's place, Atlantic City, 1899, to get to my daughter when a child about seven or eight. Later I gave her two and at her call they would always come to her, though they ran from the rest of the family.

You will frequently find people who, like yourself, are attacked by one species of insect and attract others of a similar species. It may be some of the scientific sharps could explain it. I can not. I only know it is so.

I could give you dozen of other instances where it could not possibly be anything else than the effluvium. Where no attempt was made to conciliate the animal and especially the insect. Can see no other probable reason.

In your own experience you no doubt have seen men to whom dogs would come from behind or in front without the person being really aware of their presence.

Tarantulas. While engineering through the Southwest, mid 80's, I found a number of tarantula shells, not broken or open anywhere, and was told then that they were caught by tarantula hawks, "Devil's darning needle," whose sting paralyzed the motor centers but did *not* kill. The hawk then picked up the tarantula and deposited the body in a hole or niche and then injected her eggs into the abdomen where they hatched and used the body for food, eventually emerging from the mouth.

Saw a wasp one day attack a large spider web and when the spider ran out, pounced upon him and give him a jab in the abdomen, whereupon Mr. Spider stiffened immediately. Then the wasp got a good hold on the spider and tore him loose from the web and flew away. Some more dope for the scientific guy to "explanate on."—LOUIS C. MULLIKIN, M. D., D. C.

FOLLOWING Camp-Fire custom H. B. Beynon rises to introduce himself on the occasion of his first story in the magazine.

Winnipeg, Man., Canada.

Though I have sat beside quite a few camp-fires the word has lost none of its glamour. It vividly recalls these scenes: two of us sitting in the hard-frozen snow with our backs to a big tree, the fire at our feet, trees and scrubwood all around, our rifles leaning against the trunk, a pale star or two looking coldly down through the stiff branches, curious moose and jumping deer crunching the snow, crashing through the scrub and snorting barely beyond the narrow circle of fire-light, now and then a big tree, cracked by the frost, sending out a cannon-like report. We were waiting for daylight and a moose-hunt.

Scene two: a little tent in a small clearing on the bank of the Echamamish (a sluggish tributary of the Nelson) a cold rain pelting down and two smallish men in jackets, short pants and long boots rustling dry wood for a fire over which simmered a pot of bean soup.

STILL, most of my adventures have been vicarious. Many of the imaginary adventures of my childhood were built around a lively jungle-scene done in vivid colors and pasted to an inside wall of the farm work-shop. And often of a Winter evening before the lamps were lit we used to sit round the hearth before a flickering fire while father spun yarns about wildcats, panthers, bears and ghosts. If we dared to look over our shoulders we might discern any of these things in the changing shadows at the back of the room.

One of the choicest morsels concerned an argument between our great-grandfather and a bear. The argument took place in the back woods of Ontario, near muddy York — now the city of Toronto. The old gentleman was disputing the bear's right to sit on his favorite dog while fighting off the others. He was trying to drive his point home with a good black-thorn brought straight from Erin. But the bear proved surprizingly good at rebuttal till the old soldier introduced the science of the sword and came off victorious.

IN 'EIGHTY-NINE we came to Manitoba. And when I saw the ducks and prairie chickens in hundreds, the sandhill cranes in thousands and the geese in millions I thought we had struck paradise. My chief ambition was to grow big enough to hold up a gun. I soon did. But I discovered, or rather father discovered, that I had also grown big enough to hold up my end of the work and it was precious little shooting I got.

Since then I have farmed, taught school, written life insurance, studied law, collected money and prospected. My partner and I made a queer pair of prospectors. I fear that he was more interested in geological formations and history than in gold and that my chief interest was the wild life of the country. Nevertheless we earnestly trailed the elusive dust.

ABOUT "Circumstances," which is the means of introducing me to your circle, there is little to tell. No one who has been in the wilds need be told that it is not good for the health to be caught stealing food there. That fact is the foundation of the story. But it was suggested by an authoress friend who retailed to me the following radio message which was broadcasted after a concert in some American city:

"Will some one tell—" here the announcer gave a queer name—" of Rice Lake (a mining district in northern Manitoba) that his wife is very ill and wants him to come home at once."

Now, having stood in the fire-light talking longer than I had intended, I shall merely express my pleasure at being admitted to your circle and step back into the shadows.—H. B. BEYNON.

IN READING over an old document, first published in 1789, it occurred to me that certain parts of it might be of interest to Americans in general, particularly as these passages seem to have direct, though forgotten, bearing upon certain issues vital to our continuance as a free people united under a democracy.

They are given below, not in order of their interest or importance, but following the sequence of the old document itself. It is of course possible that some Americans have already examined this proclamation written considerably more than a century ago, but it seems to have failed of its influence upon our practise and understanding of democracy to such an extent that those occasional readings may be disregarded and these fragments be considered practically new matter from the publishing point of view.

The possibilities, from a careful consideration of the provisions of this old document and from any attempt at their practical application to present-day affairs, give rise to almost unlimited speculation as to the unheaval that would result throughout our whole political and social fabric.

THE document, written so long ago by men most of whose names are now entirely unknown to the great majority of Americans, was entitled "Constitution of the United States of America" and seems to have been taken seriously enough by the men who wrote it in the hope that it might tend to preserve the various liberties for which they and their fellows had fought and to hold to their ideal of personal liberty the young nation they and their fathers had been hewing out of the wilderness for a century and a half. Among us Americans, who now reap the harvest of power and prosperity sowed by them in labor, sacrifice and blood, there is a more or less forgotten minority who are the lineal descendants of these pioneers in the New World, and to this minority, at least, the following broken fragments of the idealistic structure they reared may be of some passing interest.

Lest any one should attach too serious attention, however, to these fragments, it must be admitted that the long-dead writers of the document can not be entirely defended from the present-day stigma of idealism and at more than one point permitted themselves to swerve from the practical business of feathering their own nests and securing as much as possible for as few as possible.

The hard-headed business man of to-day, who so largely determines our ethical and spiritual standards, could easily put his finger on place after place where he could have got more out of it for himself if he had had the writing of that document. In fact, any of our present classes and sects, with the possible exception of the negligible middle class, could have got more profit out of it by applying the brisk, efficient methods of today.

STILL, for all their antique habit of entertaining ideals, they managed to rear a structure capable after the lapse of more than a century of producing an American citizen like Abraham Lincoln and enduring in at least fair condition for the greater part of a century. That it could not withstand the practical efficiency of modern methods is only natural, since nothing impregnated to any degree with idealism, altruism or unselfishness of any kind can hope for existence unless, of course, it is designed to improve the other fellow by taking away from him something he wants and you don't, or not allowing him to do something he has a right to do but that is contrary to your own ideas of what you think would be good for him—or yourself. The only relic of idealism that now makes real headway in American affairs is our sublime, unfaltering and thus far not wholly warranted faith that we can suppress an evil or something we don't like by the simple process of passing a law on the subject. Sooner or later we'll have to face the fact that even this kind of idealism does not pay dividends and that the really practical remedy is just to remove the other fellow without bothering with idealistic laws or law. There could be no greater stimulus to our famous American initiative than would be the ensuing competition to remove the other fellow before he removed you.

But we're forgetting the fragments of the antique. It opens with a fundamental statement entirely at variance with modern ideas of the purpose of existence:

WE, THE people of the United States, in order to form a more perfect Union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquillity, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.

ARTICLE I

Section IV. The times, places, and manner of holding elections for Senators and Representatives shall be prescribed in each State by the Legislature thereof; but the Congress may at any time by law make or alter such regulations, except as to places of choosing Senators.

ARTICLE II

Section I. 5. No person except a natural born citizen, or a citizen of the United States at the time of the adoption of this Constitution, shall be eligible to the office of President; neither shall any person be eligible to that office who shall not have attained to the age of thirty-five years and been fourteen years a resident within the United States.

8. Before he enter on the execution of his office he shall take the following oath or affirmation:

"I do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will faithfully execute the office of President of the United States, and will, to the best of my ability, preserve, protect, and defend the Constitution of the United States."

Section III. He shall take care that the laws be faithfully executed, and shall commission all the officers of the United States.

Section IV. The President, Vice-President, and all civil officers of the United States shall be removed from office on impeachment for and conviction of treason, bribery, or other high crimes and misdemeanors.

ARTICLE III

Section II. 3. The trial of all crimes, except in cases of impeachment, shall be by jury, and such trial shall be held in the State where the said crimes shall have been committed; but when not committed within any State the trial shall be at such place or places as the Congress may by law have directed.

ARTICLE IV

Section IV. The United States shall guarantee to every State in this Union a republican form of government, and shall protect each of them against invasion, and, on application of the Legislature, or of the Executive (when the Legislature can not be convened), against domestic violence.

ARTICLE V

The congress, whenever two-thirds of both Houses shall deem it necessary, shall propose amendments to this Constitution, or, on the application of the Legislatures of two-thirds of the several States, shall call a convention for proposing amendments, which, in either case, shall be valid to all intents and purposes, as part of this Constitution, when ratified by the Legislatures of three-fourths of the several States, or by conventions in three-fourths thereof, as the one or the other mode of ratification may be proposed by the Congress; . . . .

ARTICLE VI

2. This Constitution and the laws of the United States which shall be made in pursuance thereof and all treaties made, or which shall be made, under the authority of the United States, shall be the supreme law of the land, and the judges in every State shall be bound thereby, anything in the Constitution or laws of any State to the contrary notwithstanding.

3. The Senators and Representatives before mentioned, and the members of the several State Legislatures, and all executive and judicial officers, both of the United States and of the several States, shall be bound by oath or affirmation to support this Constitution; but no religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under the United States.

AMENDMENTS

ARTICLE I

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

ARTICLE II

A well-regulated militia being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear arms shall not be infringed.

ARTICLE IV

The right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers and effects against unreasonable searches and seizures shall be violated, and no warrants shall issue but upon probable cause, supported by oath or affirmation, and particularly describing the place to be searched, and the persons or things to be seized.

ARTICLE V

No person shall be held to answer for a capital or other infamous crime unless on a presentment or indictment of a grand jury, except in cases arising in the land or naval forces, or in the militia, when in actual service, in time of war or public danger; nor shall any person be subject for the same offence to be twice put in jeopardy of life or limb; nor shall be compelled in any criminal case to be a witness against himself, nor be deprived of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor shall private property be taken for public use without just compensation.

ARTICLE VI

In all criminal prosecutions the accused shall enjoy the right to a speedy and public trial by an impartial jury of the State and district wherein the crime shall have been committed, which districts shall have been previously ascertained by law, and to be informed of the nature and cause of the accusation; to be confronted with the witnesses against him; to have compulsory process for obtaining witnesses in his favor, and to have the assistance of counsel for his defense.

ARTICLE VII

In suits at common law, where the value in controversy shall exceed twenty dollars, the right of trial by jury shall be preserved, and no fact tried by a jury shall be otherwise reexamined in any court of the United States than according to the rules of the common law.

ARTICLE IX

The enumeration in the Constitution of certain rights shall not be construed to deny or disparage others retained by the people.

ARTICLE X

The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States respectively, or to the people.

ARTICLE XIII

1. Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction.

ARTICLE XIV

1. All persons born or naturalized in the United States and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside. No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any state deprive any person of life, liberty, or property without due process of law, nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.

ARTICLE XVIII

1. After one year from the ratification of this article the manufacture, sale or transportation of intoxicating liquors within the importation thereof into, or the exportation thereof from the United States and all territory subject to the jurisdiction thereof, for beverage purposes, is hereby prohibited.

2. The Congress and the several States shall have concurrent power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.

3. This article shall be inoperative unless it shall have been ratified as an amendment to the Constitution by the Legislatures of the several States, as provided in the Constitution, within seven years from the date of the submission hereof to the States by the Congress.

VARIOUS PRACTICAL SERVICES TO ANY READER

These services of *Adventure*, mostly free, are open to any one. They involve much time, work and expense on our part, but we ask in return only that you **read and observe the simple rules**, thus saving needless delay and trouble for us. The whole spirit of the magazine is one of friendliness. No formality between editors and readers. Whenever we can help we're ready and willing to try. **Remember: Magazines are made up ahead of time. Allow for two or three months between sending and publication.**

Identification Cards

Free to any reader. Just send us (1) your name and address, (2) name and address of party to be notified, (3) a stamped and self-addressed return envelope.

Each card bears this inscription, each printed in English, French, Spanish, German, Portuguese, Dutch, Italian, Arabic, Chinese, Russian and Japanese:

"In case of death or serious emergency to bearer, address serial number of this card, care of *Adventure*, New York, stating full particulars, and friends will be notified."

In our office, under each serial number, will be registered the name of bearer and of one or two friends, with permanent address of each. No name appears on the card. Letters will be forwarded to friend, unopened by us. Names and addresses treated as confidential. We assume no other obligations. Cards not for business identification. Cards furnished free *provided stamped and addressed envelope accompanies application.* We reserve the right to use our own discretion in all matters pertaining to these cards.

Metal Cards—For twenty-five cents we will send you *post-paid*, the same card in aluminum composition, perforated at each end. Enclose a self-addressed return envelope, but no postage. Twenty-five cents covers everything. Give same data as for pasteboard cards. Holders of pasteboard cards can be registered under both pasteboard and metal cards if desired, but old numbers can not be duplicated on metal cards. If you no longer wish your old card, destroy it carefully and notify us, to avoid confusion and possible false alarms to your friends registered under that card.

A moment's thought will show the value of this system of card-identification for any one, whether in civilization or out of it. Remember to furnish stamped and addressed envelope and to *give in full the names and addresses of self and friend or friends when applying.*

If check or money order is sent, please make it out to the Ridgway Company, *not* to any individual.

Back Issues of *Adventure*

The Boston Magazine Exchange, 24 T *Wharf, Boston, Mass., can supply* Adventure *back through* 1918, *and occasional copies before that.*

WILL SELL: Twenty issues for $2.00. All in good condition.—Address Christopher C. Ennis, 344 Willow St., Waterbury, Conn.

WILL SELL: 120 issues. From 1918 to 1922 inclusive—last two years complete. All in good condition, covers intact. Price $5.00 plus shipping charges.—Address John Kover, 1165 O'Farrell St., San Francisco, Calif.

WILL SELL: All issues from Oct., 1913 to, and including, March 30th, 1923. All in good condition. What offers?—Address John H. Mackey, 31 E. Ashley St., Jacksonville, Fla.

WILL SELL: Oct., Nov., Dec., 1914; Jan., June, Oct., Dec., 1915; April, May, June, July, Aug., Sept., Oct., 1916; Jan., Feb., Mch., Apl., May, June, 1917; all 1920, except May; all 1922; all 1923 to date. Twenty cents per copy.—Address C. E. Douglas, R. F. D. 1, Parkersburg, W. Va.

WILL SELL: 1st Sept., 1921 to 1st Jan., 1922; Jan. 20th, Apl. 10th, June 10th, July 10th and 20th, all Aug., and Sept., Oct. 20th, 1922. All 1923. In good condition. Five dollars, post-paid.—Address Walter D. Bell, Berrien Springs, Mich.

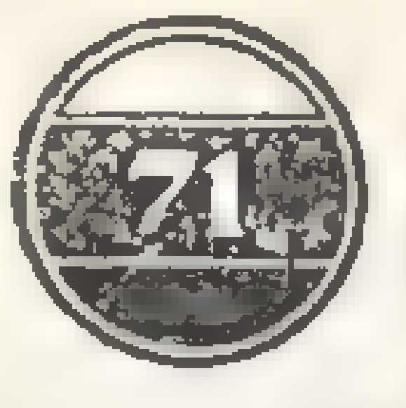
Manuscripts

Glad to look at any manuscripts. We have no "regular staff" of writers. A welcome for new writers. *It is not necessary to write asking to submit your work.*

When submitting a manuscript, if you write a letter concerning it, enclose it *with* the manuscript; do *not* send it under separate cover. Enclose stamped and addressed envelope for return. All manuscripts should be typewritten double-spaced, with wide margins, not rolled, name and address on first page. We assume no risk for manuscripts or illustrations submitted, but use all due care while they are in our hands. Payment on acceptance.

We want only clean stories. Sex, morbid, "problem," psychological and supernatural stories barred. Use almost no fact-articles. Can not furnish or suggest collaborators. Use fiction of almost any length; under 3,000 welcomed.

Camp-Fire Stations



Our Camp-Fire is extending its Stations all over the world. Any one belongs who wishes to. Any member desiring to meet those who are still hitting the trails may maintain a Station in his home or shop where wanderers may call and receive such hospitality as the Keeper wishes to offer. The only requirements are that the Station display the regular sign, provide a box for mail to be called for and keep the regular register book and maintain his Station in good repute. Otherwise Keepers run their Stations to suit themselves and are not responsible to this magazine or representative of it. List of Stations and further details are published in the Camp-Fire in the first issue of each month. Address letters regarding stations to J. Cox.

Camp-Fire Buttons

To be worn on lapel of coat by members of Camp-Fire—any one belongs who wishes to. Enameled in dark colors representing earth, sea and sky, and bears the numeral 71—the sum of the letters of the word Camp-Fire valued according to position in the alphabet. Very small and inconspicuous. Designed to indicate the common interest which is the only requisite for membership in Camp-Fire and to enable members to recognize each other when they meet in far places or at home. Twenty-five cents, post-paid, anywhere.

When sending for the button enclose a strong, self-addressed, *unstamped* envelope.

If check or money order is sent, please make it out to the Ridgway Company, *not* to any individual.

Expeditions and Employment

While we should like to be of aid in these matters, experience has shown that it is not practicable.

Missing Friends or Relatives

(See Lost Trails in next issue)

Mail Address and Forwarding Service

This office, assuming no responsibility, will be glad to act as a forwarding address for its readers or to hold mail till called for, provided necessary postage is supplied.

Addresses

Camp-Fire—Any one belongs who wishes to.

Rifle Clubs—Address Nat. Rifle Ass'n of America, 1108 Woodward Bldg., Washington, D. C.

(See also under "Standing Information" in "Ask Adventure.")

Ask Adventure

A Free Question and Answer Service Bureau of Information on Outdoor Life and Activities Everywhere and Upon the Various Commodities Required Therein. Conducted for *Adventure* Magazine by Our Staff of Experts

QUESTIONS should be sent, not to this office, but direct to the expert in charge of the section in whose field it falls. So that service may be as prompt as possible, he will answer you by mail direct. But he will also send to us a copy of each question and answer, and from these we shall select those of most general interest and publish them each issue in this department, thus making it itself an exceedingly valuable standing source of practical information. Unless otherwise requested inquirer's name and town are printed with question; street numbers not given.

When you ask for *general* information on a given district or subject the expert may give you some valuable general pointers and refer you to books or to local or special sources of information.

Our experts will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections, subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. These experts have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a given commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

1. **Service free to anybody, provided self-addressed envelop and *full* postage, *not attached,* are enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union.**
2. **Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular department whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.**
3. **No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.**
4. **Make your questions definite and specific. State exactly your wants, qualifications and intentions. Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.**
5. **Send no question until you have read very carefully the exact ground covered by the particular expert in whose section it seems to belong.**

Please Note: **To avoid using so much needed space each issue for standing matter and to gain more space for the actual meat of "Ask Adventure" the full statement of its various sections and of "Lost Trails" will be given only in alternate issues. In other issues only the bare names of the sections will be given, inquirers to get exact fields covered and names and addresses from full statement in alternate issues. Do *not* write to the magazine, but to the editors of the sections at their home addresses.**

1—3. The Sea. In Three Parts
4, 5. Islands and Coasts. In Two Parts
6, 7. New Zealand and the South Sea Islands. In Two Parts
8. Australia and Tasmania
9. Malaysia, Sumatra and Java
10. New Guinea
11. Philippine Islands
12. Hawaiian Islands and China
13. Japan
14—17. Asia. In Four Parts
18—25. Africa. In Eight Parts
26. Turkey and Asia Minor
27—29. Balkans. In Three Parts
30. Scandinavia
31. Germany, Czecho-Slovakia, Austria, Poland
32—34. South America. In Three Parts
35. Central America
36, 37. Mexico. In Two Parts
38—44. Canada. In Seven Parts
45. Alaska
46. Baffinland and Greenland
47—52. Western U. S. In Six Parts
53—56. Middle Western U. S. In Four Parts
57—62. Eastern U. S. In Six Parts
Radio
Mining and Prospecting
Weapons, Past and Present. In Three Parts
Salt and Fresh Water Fishing
Tropical Forestry
Aviation
Standing Information
Lost Trails

Sources of Radio Information

A TEXT-BOOK that sells for a nickel:

Question:—"Does the Government publish books or booklets on radio?"—Timothy C. Muriag, New Bedford, Mass.

Answer, by Mr. McNicol:—Yes; the Bureau of Standards, Department of Commerce, Washington, D. C., has got out a considerable amount of published matter on radio.

Send five cents coin to the Superintendent of Documents, Government Printing-Office, Washington, and ask for a copy of Bulletin No. 122, dated June 22, 1922, entitled "Sources of Elementary Radio Information."

You may find in this bulletin reference to the sort of information you desire.

Baits for Commercial Sea Fisheries

HOW the professionals go about it to make a catch:

Question:—"The writer is disgusted with grinding in factories for small wages; also, his health, though at the present time good, is nevertheless slowly but surely leaving him.

Therefore he desires to make a change to healthier, and perhaps more lucrative, fields of endeavor.

Small-boat fishing appeals to him, for he has sailed windjammers and has a natural leaning for the sea. But he knows very little about fishing.

You will therefore please him very much by answering the following questions, giving all the information that you can.

What is the best bait for cod, pollock, hake, haddock, herring, mackerel and other salable, salt-water fish?

What is the best method of capture for each of the above fish?

Do the 'small fellows' dig their own bait or buy it? If they dig, and you know where, please state.

Sometimes they go out and fish for more than a week. During that time how do they keep their fish in a salable condition? Is it salted or iced? Please describe the two foregoing processes.

Must the fish be dressed? If so, how?

What are seines and gill-nets? For what fish are they used? Please describe their use.

Would an auxiliary, yawl-rigged boat, between thirty and forty feet, be of sufficient size for two men? That is, would it hold enough fish to make their fishing a paying proposition?

If this letter be printed, please withhold my name and address."

Answer, by Mr. B. Brown:—Answering your questions, to the best of my ability, in order: The bait for halibut, used by the bank fishermen, is generally herring; sometimes mackerel and menhaden. The Grand Bank cod-fishers used salted clams or squid on their hand-lines or trawls. For hake and haddock similar bait is used.

There are few small fellows in these fisheries, and the bait is usually bought.

Cod, halibut, haddock and hake are usually caught on trawls from dories, with some little hand-line fishing, herring in gill-nets, with purse seines to some extent and mackerel in purse seines, sometimes in gill-net.

On the banks cod are dressed and salted down. Halibut are packed in ice, being sold in the market as fresh fish.

The fish are dressed.

Seines are long nets with a purse. They are stretched out for their whole length, and the two ends gradually brought together for the purpose of enclosing a school of fish. Then the whole seine is hauled inboard from both ends until the purse is reached, which is supposed to contain the whole school that the attempt has been made to surround. The gill-net is floated on a line, and the fish entangle themselves through the meshes, being caught by the gills.

A boat of the size you mention would be large enough for the herring fisheries off the northern coast of New England. Two men could hardly be an adequate crew for handling a purse seine.

The vessel would be too small and would carry too small a crew for the bank fisheries for halibut or cod. Might be used in gill-netting for mackerel, which are supposed to appear off the mouth of the Chesapeake in March and move north, being found in the Summer and Fall in the Gulf of Maine.

Names and addresses of department editors and the exact field covered by each section are given in the next issue of the magazine. Do not write to the magazine itself.

How to Make a Revolving Rifle

A TANG is "a projecting piece from the rear of and in line with a gun-barrel, by which it may be fastened to the stock by screws" (*Standard Dictionary*):

Question:—"I own a rifle of .22 caliber. The other day I happened to think what a fine thing it would be to have a rifle with a cylinder, hammer and trigger like a revolver.

After struggling over it I decided that a revolver of large caliber could be fitted to a rifle stock, minus the barrel and of course the stock of the revolver. Now for the questions:

Is this practicable? Would it be all right? How would be the best way to do this?

Could I get a barrel (rifle) to fit this? For instance if I succeeded in getting a revolver of, say, .44 or .45 caliber fitted to a rifle stock, could I get a barrel to fit in the place of the discarded revolver barrel? Please do not print my name or address."

Answer, by Mr. Wiggins:—Any gunsmith worthy of the name could select a revolver of suitable size, bush the chambers of the cylinder to .22 caliber and chamber them to suit; then a barrel of some good make in .22 caliber can be threaded and fitted into the revolver frame, and there you are. I may add that in this connection I have frequently considered the alteration in this manner of either a .22 Colt or Smith & Wesson .22 caliber target revolver, they being very accurate and well made. In the Colt the change could be made rather easily, but the Smith & Wesson with its front-locking device might prove more difficult.

Having done this, tangs, both upper and lower, for a rifle stock would be oxyacetylene-welded to the revolver grip and a stock attached. You will have then a real revolving rifle.

But there are other questions to consider. Principal of these is the gas-escape from the crevice 'twixt barrel and cylinder. This is considerable, even in the .22 calibers with their low pressure, and in my own revolver of this caliber, and on which I have a combination stock and holster, the effect is such that it disturbs me in firing, as I can't help flinching, and thus spoiling the shot. I never was able to better my offhand work with the stock in place on the revolver, I may say.

So, while here is the advice on how to have the job done, I say not to waste money on it, as I conside the money so spent wasted. You can get a good .22 Colt or Smith & Wesson revolver or a Colt or Reising automatic .22 pistol, and have lots of enjoyment from it, but I'd forget stocks if I were you.

The Dead City Uxmal

FOR the benefit of those of us who don't happen to be architects, I announce in advance that the dictionary calls a "grecque" "an ornamental Greek fret or meander." You may be glad to know that about two minutes from now!

Question:—"Can you give me a description of the old ruins of the city of Uxmal, located in Yucatan, and oblige? I send you stamps for reply."—ROBT. B. CLARK, Herrin, Ill.

Answer, by Mr. Mahaffey:—The city of Uxmal was formerly the capital of that branch of the Maya Indians called the Tutal Xiu. It is believed that this place was the original city of the Toltecs, which played a very important part in early Mexican history. The ruins cover a large extent of territory. From a distance a dozen or more imposing structures of white limestone are seen, and the ruins of many more can be traced.

The most notable sanctuary of Uxmal is known as the House of the Dwarf at present. It is over fifty feet high, and is on the top of a pyramid one hundred feet high. Two stairways on opposite sides of the pyramid lead to this building. It is so named because the natives say it was built in one night by a savage dwarf.

Long after the city was abandoned this temple was held in special reverence. The Spanish priests used to find offerings of cocoa and copal on it, and this they attributed to devil worship.

Two lines of parallel walls, parts of which are still standing, enclose a court or quadrangle which is similar to the Ball Court of Chichen Itza, another famous Maya ruin in the same State. The group of buildings around it encloses more than one hundred rooms. All the buildings seem to have been built on small platforms or terraces.

There is also at this point a high terrace or platform that covers over three acres of ground, and on which is a second and third terrace, upon the latter of which is the ruin of a building known as the Governor's Palace. This building is one of the finest samples of early American architecture still extant. It stands at an elevation of forty-four feet above the plains and commands a splendid view of the city. Its exterior walls are decorated with sculptured masonry, in the making of which it is estimated that there are over twenty thousand separate stones.

The building is three hundred and twenty-two feet long, and is divided into three parts by two arcades which pass clear through. It is built entirely of stone without ornament to a height of ten feet; then comes a cornice, above which is a wall that is a bewildering maze of beautiful sculpture.

This frieze has a row of colossal heads, and is divided into panels, which are alternately filled with grecques in high relief and diamond or lattice work. All the lintels of the building here are of wood in an excellent state of preservation.

At Uxmal there is a building called the House of Turtles because of a row of turtles used as ornaments in the upper cornice. It is the freest of ornament of any of the buildings. The turtles are found sculptured at various places along the cornice.

The House of the Pigeons is the name of another building, because of the fancied resemblance to a dove cote. The crest of the roof is perforated with many rectangular openings—but the resemblance is seen only by stretching the imagination.

At this city there are found none of the natural wells found in the other Maya ruins in Yucatan; but these people constructed some natural reservoirs at some distance from the town, in which the rainfall was collected, and which gave the necessary water-supply for them.

Then some of the buildings seem to have subterranean cisterns of large size under them. Heavy rainfall occurs here for about one-half the year, but during the other half there is practically no rainfall, and water becomes very scarce.

The so-called House of the Nuns is the largest building and bears the richest and most intricate carvings at Uxmal. It is composed of four buildings, the largest of which is two hundred and seventy-nine feet in length. The four buildings enclose a great court with sides two hundred and fourteen and two hundred and fifty-eight feet in length, the entrance to which is through a high triangular arched gateway.

This building originally contained no less than eighty-eight apartments of different sizes. A number of writers believe that a number of these buildings at Uxmal are of comparatively recent construction, because of the appearance of the stone and the well-preserved character of the wood used in the construction.

These structures are only a part of the ruins that still remain, for the jungle on either side hides the remains of what were once imposing buildings. Many of these have been literally torn asunder by trees, whose roots have forced themselves between the stones and pried them apart. No doubt this city once held thousands of people; but today it is without inhabitants. The pomp and glory of former times have disappeared, and all is silent except for the birds.

This is about as good a description of Uxmal as I can give you. Besides Uxmal there are two other cities of the old Maya civilization—Chichen Itza and Palenque, a cross being found in the ruins of the latter which has been a puzzle to antiquaries.

I hope this will be of use to you.

Chances in Western Washington

WHERE the small-crop farmer—some of him anyway—is getting rich:

Question:—"I am thinking of going to British Columbia around Vancouver, and would like to get some dope on that part. How high up is it? I have heart trouble. Would like to settle there. Have money. Have been in Alaska for a number of years. Any information you can send will be thankfully received."—E. J. DOWD, Alliance, Neb.

Answer, by Mr. Carson:—Vancouver is a seaport and is right at sea level. Like all northern ports it is the stamping-ground of the sea fog in Winter, and while I do not know that this would affect your heart it might do so by making breathing difficult. You ask the altitude, which is my reason for mentioning this.

If you are looking for a congenial climate mid pleasant surroundings I believe you can find it in western Washington as well as any place else. I do not know your financial circumstances; but you could get a small tract of improved land that would make you a living, and it would not cost you any more than it would to homestead.

As for light employment in Vancouver, there is no chance. The place is full of English remittance men who grab off everything of this sort at a wage that nobody else could live on. The assistance they get "from 'ome" helps to such an extent that they can defy competition. Then again the Oriental element there is a bad thing for the labor market.

Here in Snohomish County you can get a five-acre tract with a small house on it and make a very pleasant living either from chickens or berries or both. Not far from here are two men who took up a raw fourteen acres a few years ago, pulled the stumps and put in berries. Today they are worth at least ten thousand dollars each and have one of the show places of the county. They started with practically nothing, and as they are both fat as seals it is easy to believe their statement that they did not injure themselves by hard work.

In fact this climate does not have a tendency to cause a person to yearn for strenuous labor. I know for my own part I have become as lazy as blazes since I came down from the North.

I would not advise you to come to Monroe as this town seems to be in the grip of a bunch of "home guards" who bitterly resent the advent of new blood. There is just enough population to give the local merchants a mighty good trade. The same thing holds good along other lines of endeavor, and any attempt to establish a new industry which would increase population and thus invite competition is severely sat upon by the local magnates. There is also a new water-works system to be paid for that is going to make property in this burg decidedly undesirable for years to come owing to heavy taxes that will have to be levied.

Snohomish, eight miles west of here, is a different proposition. There is a heap of industry shown there as well as a progressive spirit, and I am sure that if you were looking for a good place in which to grow old gracefully that would be a desirable spot. As for scenic surroundings, this country has nothing else. There is not a town in the country that is not a beauty spot for at least ten months of the year, and the other two are by no means repulsive.

Stump land can be purchased for from fifty dollars an acre up to a hundred. Cleared land brings anywhere from two hundred to a thousand according to the extent to which it is developed and improved. An income of five hundred dollars a year from an acre of land is not unusual, and a man who had proved it told me that a five-acre tract, properly handled, should show a net profit of $2,500 per year. Investigation has convinced me that he was correct in his estimate.

Try Vancouver if you wish; but before settling there definitely I am suggesting that you take a look at least at this neck of the timber.

"Ask Adventure" service costs you nothing whatever but reply postage and self-addressed envelop.

Bananas

DIDN'T know that clothes and paper are made out of 'em, did you? At any rate, I didn't till just now:

Question:—"I would like so much if you would tell me all about bananas.

Enclosed you will find stamps."—MILLIE B. GARLAND, Milton, N. C.

Answer, by Mr. Emerson:—The soil for raising this common fruit must be deep and rich, preferably low-lying river-bottom land. The woods and brush must be cleared away with ax and machete. The roughly cleared land is then left to dry for about a month; then a fire is started to complete the work. After this there are only two operations—digging the holes to set the plants in and then setting out the plants. The holes are dug 15 feet apart, or on an average of 200 to the acre. A native with a spade can dig 200 of these holes in a day.

Banana-plants grow from suckers, or *matas*. They can be bought for one cent each. They are placed in the hole and the earth is tightly packed around them. There is nothing else to do until the crop appears except to keep the brush chopped back when it begins to grow. In about eight months the bunches begin to get of sufficient size to cut. They are cut green and allowed to ripen off the tree. A banana that ripens on the tree is not good for eating, due to several reasons.

Cultivation cost per acre is: Clearing $5; *matas*, $2; planting, $2; incidental, $1; brush, $2; total, $12.

When the bunches are cut off, the entire banana bush (or tree) which is a great, soft, spongy mass, not unlike a gigantic lily with huge leaves, is cut off near the ground. Upon this stump new suckers quickly appear, usually two, sometimes three or more. Only two should be allowed to grow in order to produce the best fruit.

These spring up more rapidly from the stump than if they had been set in the ground, as they begin to bear fruit in about six months, after which they in turn are cut down and the process is repeated. This can be continued for seven or eight years, when it is good policy to dig up the old stump and plant another in different ground.

The first year, from 200 *matas* per acre, at least 150 bunches should be harvested, and the second year 400. Thirty cents per bunch is a fair price.

A native boils half-ripe bananas and uses them for bread; he takes the little green ones with the milk still in them and mashes them after boiling like potatoes; he fries them in place of meat; and they are used by him for dessert. A banana has more strength-giving value than a chunk of beefsteak of same size. Many tropical travelers, hard put to it for grub, have eaten these ripe with salt and thus have been able to exist for long stretches of time. At present the natives are making a good quality of flour of the banana. It is to the natives what the potato is to the people of the U. S. A.

In Japan the fiber of a certain species of banana (*musa basjoo*) is used for the manufacture of *bashofu* cloth and as a substitute for wall-paper.

The natives of the West Indies use the fiber of another species for making cheap clothing and bags.

The Chinese make a good quality of paper from another species.

However, with other good fiber plants in abundance, it is doubtful if the banana will ever be extensively used for this purpose.

A few years ago a peculiar plague attacked the banana-plants of Central America. It was noticed that the Jamaica variety was the one particularly attacked. It looked for a time as if the industry was doomed.

However, it was found that certain varieties of Chinese bananas were not subject to the pest. These were substituted and the disease was eradicated. Consumers of bananas in the U. S. A. were unaware of the change.

There are a great many varieties of bananas, ranging from the Chinese dwarf, not much larger than one's little finger, to immense cooking-bananas half as long as one's arm. "Plantain" and "banana" are words used interchangeably in different countries. They are native of Ceylon and India, from where the first plants in all countries are supposed to have come. In Central America and the West Indies those that are eaten raw are called bananas, and those that are used for cooking are called plantains (*platanos*).

All varieties belong to the *genus Musa*. This name came down from ancient times and originated, it is said, from the fact the philosophers were wont to recline under the shade of the plants and eat the fruit that fell down on them; a theory hard for one who has engaged in the industry to believe.

If you don't want an answer enough to enclose full return postage to carry it, you don't want it.

Gold of the Philippines

IT'S there—lots of it probably, if all of it can only be found:

Question:—"The writer holds an interesting newspaper clipping on striking 'pay dirt' in the Philippine Islands by a group of Persian financiers. Under the supervision of William Kane, an American of course, they have taken out as high as 700 ounces of 'dirt' in a single run with a value of $14,000. The project promises fabulous wealth for their persistent efforts against the jungle, and the expenditure to date is a quarter of a million. The article then details to some extent the work necessary to get the huge Bucyrus dredge 15 miles inland to the workings from the port of Lianga, Surigao, taking three years to dismantle it and transport it by means of men and carabaos, and then set it up and get it to working on the main outcropping vein.

These Persian capitalists are said to be very wealthy, and are represented in this project by M. M. Tackey, and they are also acquiring coal-mines on Cebu. Can you inform me as to the name of this company and how I might get in touch with them? Also send me some data as to the mineral lands of the islands, travelage and customs?

What are the prospects in this line [for a red-blooded American to locate in the islands—no means to speak of, but plenty of experience and training that will enable him to hold his own; age 27, and single?

A copy of *Adventure* came into my hands about a year ago, and ever since I have been a constant reader, not so much for the interesting stories it always contains, but for the 'Ask Adventure' department, which I always read first. Therein I have picked up a deal of information on certain matters, and the whyfor of this letter.

I note you reprint questions that in your opinion might be of information to others. If this be deemed of sufficient value for such please use it with but the exception of my name. My thanks are extended at this writing for your attention." — —— ——, Beckley, W. Va.

Answer, by Mr. Connor:—I have never heard of the Persian firm which you mention in your letter, but I can give some statistics relative to gold-mining in the islands.

There is no question as to the richness of the islands in mineral products; but, to use the old saying, "Gold is where you find it," meaning, of course, that there is practically no set rule for locating it. The islands have the metallic family of gold, silver, copper, manganese and iron, and of the non-metallic group we know coal, asbestos, guano and phosphates, sulfur, mineral waters, petroleum, gas, cement, salt and others of minor importance.

There are several points known to contain gold—central Luzon (Abra River and Tayabas) Mindoro, Misamis, Surigao and Mindanao. By figures it is agreed that there are 800 to 1,000 square kilometers of placer ground in the islands undeveloped. The successful mines are the Colorado in Masbate Island, with those of Camarines, Baguio, Mountain Province, Aroroy and Masbate. The development of gold industry since 1910 has been as follows:

1910 . .	232,311 fine grams . .	308,860 pesos.
1918 . .	1,937,941 fine grams . .	2,575,670 pesos.

Your qualifications fit you for a business executive; but as to whether you would desire it with the firm mentioned, or desire to prospect, I can not tell. But suppose you write to the Manila Board of Trade and try to locate the concern's name and address mentioned, and then take it up with them.

Have I answered your letter to your satisfaction? I hope that I have; and if not, call and I will do what further I can.

Free service, but don't ask us to pay the postage to get it to you.

A Canoe on the Mississippi

ASK Mr. Zerr:

Question:—"I would like to ask you a few questions about the construction of a canoe.

I am twenty years old and have had no experience in boat-building. Would like to know what kind of wood to use and measurements for a canoe to use on the Mississippi River.

Would a canvas canoe be practical? And how to construct the bottom, sides and curving ends?"—R. C. McBryde, Memphis, Tenn.

Answer, by Mr. Zerr:—A well-constructed canoe can be used on any stream. A canvas canoe also is practicable providing it has been treated with pitch or a hard-drying cement. Am enclosing a catalog which has dimensions and diagrams, and if you are mechanically inclined I am sure it will serve your purpose. Should this not be entirely satisfactory, let me know and I will attempt to secure further information.

Old Songs That Men Have Sung

Devoted to outdoor songs, preferably hitherto unprinted—songs of the sea, the lumber-camps, Great Lakes, the West, old canal days, the negro, mountains, the pioneers, etc. Send in what you have or find, so that all may share in them.

Although conducted primarily for the collection and preservation of old songs, the editor will give information about modern ones when he can do so and *IF* all requests are accompanied with self-addressed envelop and reply postage (*NOT* attached). Write to Mr. Gordon direct, *NOT* to the magazine.

Conducted by R. W. GORDON, 1262 Euclid Ave., Berkeley, Calif.

NOT long ago I ran across a copy of a poem by W. H. Saunders entitled "The Ocean Burial." It is the original from which the well-known cowboy song "Oh Bury Me Not on the Lone Prairie" was made, and is rare enough to justify its appearing once more in print. I copy it from De Witt's "'Oh How Is That for High?' Songster" of 1870.

The Ocean Burial

"Oh, bury me not in the deep, deep sea!"
The words came low and mournfully
From the pallid lips of a youth who lay
On his cabin couch at the close of the day.
He had wasted and pined, till o'er his brow
Death's shade had slowly passed, and now
When the land and his fond loved home were nigh,
They had gathered around to see him die.

"Oh, bury me not in the deep, deep sea
Where the billowing shroud will swell o'er me,
Where no light will break through the dark cold wave,
And no sunbeam rest upon my grave!
It matters not, I have often been told,
Where the body shall lie when the heart is cold,
Yet grant, oh grant this boon to me:
Oh, bury me not in the deep, deep sea!

"For in fancy I've listened to the well-known words,
The free wild winds, and the songs of the birds;
I have thought of home, of cot, and of bower,
And of scenes that I loved in childhood's hour:
I had even hoped to be laid when I died
In the churchyard there on the green hillside:
By the home of my fathers my grave should be;
Oh, bury me not in the deep, deep sea!

"Let my death slumbers be where a mother's prayer,
And a sister's tear shall be mingled there.
It will be sweet, ere the gentle heart's throb is o'er
To know, when its fountain shall gush no more,
That those it so fondly hath yearned for will come
To plant the wild flower of Spring on my tomb.
Let me lie where those loved ones will weep over me;
Oh, bury me not in the deep, deep sea!

"And there is another whose tears would be shed
For him who lay far in an ocean bed;
In hours that it pains me to think of now
She hath twined those locks and hath kissed this brow.
In the hair she hath wreathed, shall the sea-serpent hiss?
And the brow she hath pressed, shall the cold wave kiss?
For the sake of that bright one that waiteth for me
Oh, bury me not in the deep, deep sea!

"She hath been in my dreams—" His voice failed there;
They gave no heed to his dying prayer.
They have lowered him o'er the vessel's side;
Above him has closed the dark cold tide.
Where to dip the light wings the sea-bird rests,
And the blue waves dance o'er the ocean crest,
Where the billows bound and the winds sport free,
They have buried him there in the deep, deep sea.

In this case the adaptation is much more vivid and much more singable than the original. Compare with the version printed above the following verses which were taken down by John Lomax from the lips of the cowboys themselves:

"O bury me not on the lone prairie
Where the wild coyotes will howl o'er me
Where the rattlesnakes hiss and the crow flies free,
O bury me not on the lone prairie.

"O bury me not—" and his voice failed there,
But we took no heed of his dying prayer;
In a narrow grave just six by three
We buried him there on the lone prairie.

Yes, we buried him there on the lone prairie
Where the owl all night hoots mournfully,
And the blizzard beats and the winds blow free
O'er his lonely grave on the lone prairie.

I'd like to print the whole of this version, but it's a little long for our limited space. You can find it along with many other good songs in John A. Lomax: "Cowboy Songs and Other Frontier Ballads," published by The MacMillan Company in their "75c Library." Any bookstore can obtain the volume for you, or you can write direct to the publishers in New York.

So many requests have come in from readers who desired a copy of this cowboy version that I multigraphed a number of copies. Some of these are still left, and while they last I'll be glad to send one to any of you men who will return the favor by sending in with your request a copy of an old-time song that you think should be printed some time in this department.

CAPTAIN J. C. CANTWELL, of Sausalito, sang to me a few weeks ago an old song about the famous fight between Heenan and Sayers which deserves to be remembered, in spite of the fact that it's rather grandiloquent in tone and not very good poetry. It was a favorite with American sailors in the old days. I have never seen it in print.

The Bold Benicia Boy

It was down in merrie England
  All in the bloom of Spring,
And England filled her glasses,
  She filled them to the brim:
She drank this toast to Englishmen,
  "The bravest of the brave,
Who rule all men or whether it be
  On land or on the wave."

Then Uncle Sam put on his specs
  As he looked o'er the main.
"And is this your English bully
  A-bellowin' again?
Oh doesn't he remember
  Ben Franklin good and strong
Who used to play with lightning
  When his day's work was done?

"Johnny Bull, don't you remember
  Our Washington of old,
And likewise Lake E-ri-e
  With Perry brave and bold?
It was there you got a lesson
  Which caused you for to sigh;
So beware of Yankee muscle—
  Johnny Bull, mind yo' eye."

It was down in merrie England
  All in the bloom of Spring,
And England's bold champion
  Stood stripped within the ring
To fight the noble Heenan,
  The valiant Son of Troy,
And to try his British muscles on
  The brave Benicia Boy.

Oh the copper was now tossed in air;
  The minutes did begin.
"It's two to one," said England:
  They both went rushing in.
They fought like noble heroes
  Till one received a blow,
And the red crimson tide
  From the Yankee's nose did flow.

"We have got first blood," cried Johnny Bull,
  "Let England shout for joy,"
Which cheered the British bully
  And the brave Benicia Boy.
The tiger rose within him,
  The lightning seized his eye;
"You may smile away, Old England,
  But, Johnny, mind yo' eye."

Then the grandest round of all
  That the world has ever seen:
The son of Uncle Sam took up
  The champion off his feet,
And with his grasping withers
  He hurled him in the air,
And over the ropes he knocked him—
  How the Englishmen did stare.

Then come all you Yankee heroes
  Whose fame and fortune's made,
Look on that lofty eagle
  And never be afraid!
May the Union last forever!
  The flag is now unfurled
And the Star Spangled Banner
  Proudly floats o'er the world!

Songs of this type are obviously the work of a single author; they have little or no trace of the ballad or folk-song style. Usually they are known as "come-all-ye's" because so many of them began with the words, "Oh come all ye, etc." When in print they are to be found in the old paper-covered songsters, once common, but now hard to find.

The editor is gradually getting together a collection of these songsters in order that he may be better able to trace the songs that are requested. He would be greatly obliged to any reader who could add to his collection.

SEND all songs and all requests for information to R. W. Gordon, 1262 Euclid Ave., Berkeley, California. Do not send them to the magazine.

THE TRAIL AHEAD

OCTOBER 10TH ISSUE

Besides the **complete novel** and the **complete novelette** mentioned on the second page of this issue, the next *Adventure* will bring you the following stories:

THE GUEST OF MOHAMMA SANI — *Robert Simpson*
His blood was not spilled by any man.

THAT CROOKED SMILE — *John Webb*
One-Two Mac meets the town bully.

OLD MISERY A Five-Part Story Part III — *Hugh Pendexter*
The mountain man looks to his guns.

CROPS, CRADLES AND CONSEQUENCES *An Incident in the Affairs of Mohamed Ali* — *George E. Holt*
He deals with a new pretender to the Shareefian Empire of Morocco.

ORDERS — *Ramsey Benson*
Bound by red-tape, the trainmen would have let the horses freeze.

BREECHES — *Leonard H. Nason*
They were dee-skin, and the sergeant loved them.

THE CRY FROM THE MINARET — *H. A. Noureddin Addis*
An Armenian doctor—and a certain invalid.

"For Sale!"

AS THEY WRANGLED over her price she cowered behind the curtain, striving to veil her beauty from their ravenous eyes.

The dreadful bargain was made. The babble in the stuffy room increased. Suddenly it ceased. All eyes were turned toward the terrible, veiled figure who appeared at the door.

"Her price?" he said, his weird green eyes fixed upon the girl who had just been sold to another man. The slave dealer's teeth began to chatter.

"Accept the maiden as an unworthy gift," he faltered—

Who was the veiled stranger, that this motley of men—Arabs, Circassians, Nubians, Chinese—should tremble at his approach? What was this young girl's fate to be?

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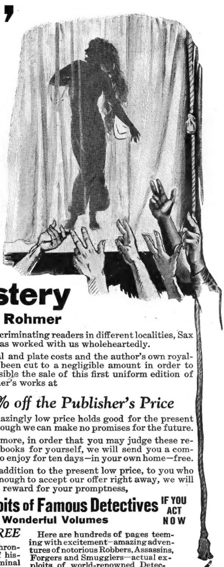

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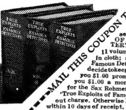
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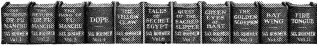
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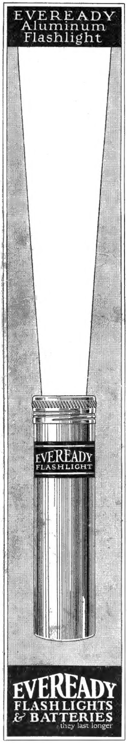

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